

HARPER'S MODERN PLAYS

"THIS
WAS A MAN"

NOEL COWARD

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“THIS WAS A MAN”

“THIS
WAS A MAN”
A Comedy in Three Acts

By
NOEL COWARD

*Author of “Easy Virtue”
“The Vortex,” “Hay Fever,” Etc.,*



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“THIS WAS A MAN”

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First Edition

L-A

TO
JOHN C. WILSON

PALERMO *April* 1926

“THIS WAS A MAN”

Act One

CHARACTERS

(In the order of their appearance)

EDWARD CHURT
CAROL CHURT
HARRY CHALLONER
MARGOT BUTLER
BERRY
BOBBIE ROMFORD
ZOE ST. MERRYN
MAJOR EVELYN BATHURST
BLACKWELL

SCENES

ACT I

SCENE I: Edward Churt's studio in Knightsbridge—2.30
A.M.

SCENE II: The same. The following afternoon.

ACT II

SCENE: Evelyn Bathurst's flat. The same night.

ACT III

SCENE: The same as Act I. The following morning.

“THIS WAS A MAN”

ACT I

SCENE I

EDWARD CHURT's studio in Knightsbridge is furnished with mingled opulence and good taste—he is a successful modern portrait-painter.

[When the curtain rises it is about 2.30 a.m. There is a faint glow from the fireplace on the left; a table stands more or less C., upon which is a reading lamp illuminating a decanter of whisky, some siphons, a plate of biscuits and another of sandwiches, and two or three glasses; there are also a box of cigarettes and matches. The rest of the room is in comparative darkness. There is the sound of a taxi drawing up in the street, then after a suitable pause the noise of the front door being opened. CAROL CHURT enters, followed by HARRY CHALLONER. They are both in evening dress. CAROL is lovely and exquisitely gownéd; her vivid personality is composed of a minimum of intellect and a maxi-

mum of sex. HARRY possesses all the earmarks of a social success—he is an excellent ballroom dancer, compared with which his activities in the city are negligible.]

CAROL

Don't make a noise.

HARRY

I wasn't.

CAROL

I didn't say you were—I said don't.

HARRY

All right.

CAROL

Do you want a drink?

HARRY

Yes, please.

CAROL

Help yourself then—and give me one.

[*She takes off her cloak and lights a cigarette.*]

HARRY

Say when.

CAROL

That's enough.

[*He fills up the glass with soda and hands it to her.*]

HARRY

Here.

CAROL

Thanks.

HARRY

You are a marvel.

CAROL

Why?

HARRY

You're so steady.

CAROL

I don't see any reason for being anything else.

HARRY

You don't think he'll find out?

CAROL

Of course not.

HARRY

Where does he sleep?

CAROL

[*Pointing to door, R.*]

In there.

[HARRY, *with big drink in his hand, tiptoes over and listens at the door.*]

HARRY

I can't hear a sound.

CAROL

He doesn't snore unless he's taken to it lately.

HARRY

[*Returning*]

Darling, do you love me?

CAROL

What a silly question!

HARRY

It's all been so wonderful.

CAROL

[*Smiling*]

Has it?

HARRY

Well, hasn't it?

CAROL

Yes, it has rather. [He puts down his drink and takes her in his arms.] Look out—
[She is holding her glass out at arm's length to prevent it upsetting.]

HARRY

Put it down, darling—
[There is a good deal of passion in his voice when he says, “darling.”]

CAROL

Why?

HARRY

I want to kiss you.

CAROL

Again?

HARRY

Yes, again and again and again—forever.
[He takes her glass and slams it down on the table.]

CAROL

Shhh! Don't be a fool.

HARRY

I don't care—
[He kisses her lingeringly.]

CAROL

[*Gently disentangling herself*]
I do—it's silly to be reckless.

HARRY

I don't believe you love me as much as you did before.

CAROL

It isn't that at all—you know it isn't.

HARRY

Kiss me then.

CAROL

Very well.

[*She goes up to him and quietly kisses him on the mouth. They stand there motionless for a moment.*]

HARRY

I want you—all over again—for the first time.

CAROL

[*Stroking his face*]
Darling.

HARRY

I'm crazy about you.

CAROL

You must go home to bed now.

HARRY

Will you telephone me?

CAROL

Yes.

HARRY

First thing?

CAROL

Yes.

HARRY

Promise.

CAROL

Promise.

[They go out of the door. There is a little whispering in the hall. Then a silence and the sound of the front door closing gently. CAROL comes back into the studio pensively. She finishes her whisky and soda, takes a biscuit, and flings her cloak over her arm; then she switches off the light and goes slowly off up R. Her door

closes. After a slight pause EDWARD CHURT rises from the big armchair by the fire in which he has been sitting with his back to the audience, and goes over to the table. He switches on the lamp again and helps himself to a sandwich; he munches it thoughtfully for a moment, then with an air of determination picks up the whole plate, switches off the lamp and—retires to his room.]

CURTAIN

SCENE II

The scene is the same. It is an afternoon a few weeks later about five o'clock.

[When the curtain rises, LADY MARGOT BUTLER is seated down-stage in a slightly picturesque attitude. She is a good-looking woman of about thirty-five. EDWARD is working on a sketch of her and is hidden from view behind an easel.]

MARGOT

I'm much more comfortable now, Edward.

EDWARD

Yes, I see you are. Would you mind getting uncomfortable again?

MARGOT

[*Rearranging herself*]

It is a shame. Why do you insist on drawing people in such agonizing positions?

EDWARD

It makes them feel they're getting their money's worth. You can rest in a moment and have a cigarette.

MARGOT

Was Violet Netherson pleased with your malicious portrayal of all her worst points?

EDWARD

Delighted. As a matter of fact, it is one of the best things I've done.

MARGOT

Yes, but hardly from her point of view. I should never forgive you if you did that to me.

EDWARD

I shall do something much worse if you don't keep still.

MARGOT

What about that cigarette?

EDWARD

Shut up.

MARGOT

All right. [*There is silence for a moment.*] Is that one by the door new?

EDWARD

Yes, it's the Fenwick girl—her mother's convinced that she's a wild woodland type.

MARGOT

St. John's Woodland.

EDWARD

I had a bit of a tussle with her.

MARGOT

I like it.

EDWARD

There now, you can relax. I shan't do any more to-day.

[MARGOT rises quickly and strides about.]

MARGOT

I should loathe to be a professional model.

EDWARD

There are worse fates I believe. Would you like tea or cocktails or anything?

MARGOT

I should like some tea now and a cocktail later on.

EDWARD

Are you going to stay a long time?

MARGOT

I told Bobbie to pick me up.

EDWARD

[*Ringing bell*]

How is Bobbie?

MARGOT

Splendid. I'm still mad about him.

EDWARD

That's right.

MARGOT

You don't like him, do you?

EDWARD

I hardly know him.

MARGOT

He's such a darling, and a great comfort to me.

EDWARD

[*Standing back and regarding his sketch*]
I shall only need one more sitting.

MARGOT

I believe you disapprove of me and Bobbie.

EDWARD

Don't be ridiculous. Why should I?

MARGOT

You must *never* disapprove of things, Edward.
It's so second rate.

EDWARD

You don't mean that a bit.

MARGOT

Yes, I do.

EDWARD

You secretly disapprove of the whole affair, yourself, really. That's why you always talk about it so much—to sort of brazen it out and put yourself straight with yourself.

MARGOT

Edward, how *can* you! Anyhow, why shouldn't I talk about it. You all know. Everybody knows.

EDWARD

Reticence as a national quality seems to be on the wane.

MARGOT

What a pompous remark!

EDWARD

Perhaps—but true. [Enter BERRY.] Tea please, Berry.

BERRY

Very good, sir.

MARGOT

Lemon with mine, please, Berry.

BERRY

Yes, my lady.

[He goes out.]

MARGOT

You're an awfully difficult person to know properly.

EDWARD

Am I?

MARGOT

You don't give an inch, do you?

EDWARD

Why should I?

MARGOT

Oh, I don't know. Confidences and discussions of everything make life so much more amusing.

EDWARD

Modern society seems to demand intimacy all in a minute. You all lay bare your private affairs to comparative strangers without a qualm.

MARGOT

Oh, Edward, dear, *we're* not strangers.

EDWARD

We met for the first time six months ago.

MARGOT

It seems *ever* so much more.

EDWARD

You'd told me all about Jim and Bobbie and your exact feelings toward each of them before we'd known each other a month.

MARGOT

It's because you're so sympathetic; you invite confidence.

EDWARD

Nonsense.

MARGOT

You're being perfectly horrid to-day. Has anything happened to upset you?

EDWARD

No, I don't think so.

MARGOT

Well I shan't sit for you again unless you're in a better temper.

EDWARD

Don't be cross.

MARGOT

I'm not cross. I'm hurt.

EDWARD

I think perhaps I do feel a little nervy.

MARGOT

There now, I knew it.

[BERRY enters with tea.]

EDWARD

Here's tea, anyhow. When Lord Romford calls, Berry, show him straight in, will you?

BERRY

Yes, sir.

EDWARD

You'd better make some cocktails.

BERRY

Very well, sir.

[He goes out.]

MARGOT

Do you want lemon or milk?

EDWARD

Neither, thanks. Just plain unvarnished tea.

MARGOT

Is that Katherine Loring? [Looking at picture.]

EDWARD

Yes, unfinished.

MARGOT

She always is unfinished. She has a negligible personality, I'm afraid. Here you are.

[*She hands him his tea.*]

EDWARD

Thank you.

MARGOT

I hear Zoe's back.

EDWARD

Yes, she rang me up this morning.

MARGOT

Where's she been, exactly?

EDWARD

All over the place.

MARGOT

Who with?

EDWARD

By herself, I believe.

MARGOT

My dear, she must have been with *somebody*. She couldn't have been all alone after all that awful business. She'd have gone mad.

EDWARD

She'll be here soon. You'll be able to ask her about it.

MARGOT

You were engaged to her once, weren't you?

EDWARD

Now then, Margot.

MARGOT

You were. I *know* you were. Carol told me.

EDWARD

Well, as a matter of fact, we weren't actually. We've been friends since we were children and we did discuss marriage at one time, but without great conviction.

MARGOT

I can't understand why she let Kenneth divorce her. Everybody knows—

EDWARD

Zoe wished for her freedom and just went about getting it as quickly as possible.

MARGOT

Well I don't know how she could have faced it. I shouldn't have dared—

EDWARD

You're less independent than she is.

MARGOT

I believe you're going to be horrid again.
[BERRY enters.]

BERRY

[Announcing]

Lord Romford.

[BOBBIE ROMFORD enters. *He is a nice-looking, meaningless young man.*]

BOBBIE

Excuse my butting in like this, Churt.
[He and EDWARD shake hands.]

EDWARD

We were expecting you. The cocktails will be here in a moment.

BOBBIE

Hallo, Margot! How's the picture going?

MARGOT

It's nearly finished, but Edward won't let me see it. He's been thoroughly soured up all the afternoon.

EDWARD

Margot has been trying to persuade me to brush my hair with her.

BOBBIE

[*Puzzled*]

Brush your hair?

EDWARD

Yes, metaphorically speaking.

BOBBIE

[*Relieved*]

Oh, I see.

EDWARD

Hair-brushing is a symbol of girlish confidences. Even the nicest people do it.

MARGOT

Edward shuts up like a clam the moment I try to discuss anything in the least interesting. Where have you been, Bobbie?

BOBBIE

Playing squash with Evie at the Bath Club.

EDWARD

Why didn't you bring him along?

BOBBIE

He said he was coming on later.

MARGOT

I suppose he won.

BOBBIE

Yes; he always does.

[Enter BERRY with a tray of cocktails.]

EDWARD

Put them down here, Berry. [He clears a space on the table.] Do you want any more tea, Margot?

MARGOT

No thanks.

EDWARD

Take away the remains, then, Berry.

BERRY

Yes, sir.

[He piles the tea things up and takes them out.]

BOBBIE

I saw your wife in St. James's Street, Churt.

MARGOT

[*Eagerly*]

Who was she with?

BOBBIE

Harry Challoner.

MARGOT

I love Harry. Don't you, Edward?

EDWARD

Passionately.

MARGOT

I expect they were going to Fanny's. She's got a mah-jong party. She seems to imagine it's a novelty. I ought to be there, really, but I just felt I couldn't bear it—all those hot scented women squabbling over the scores.

BOBBIE

Do you mind if I take a cigarette, Churt?

EDWARD

Of course not. I'm so sorry. [*He hands the box.*] Margot?

MARGOT

Thanks, Edward dear.

[BERRY enters.]

BERRY

[Announcing]

Mrs. St. Merryn.

[ZOE ST. MERRYN enters. *She is beautifully dressed and pleasantly unexaggerated.*]

ZOE

Edward! [She takes both his hands.] I'm terribly excited at seeing you again.

EDWARD

It's grand, isn't it, after a whole year.

ZOE

I've got so much to say I don't know where to start. [She sees MARGOT.] Margot, this is lovely. How are you?

[They kiss.]

MARGOT

You look divine, darling. Do you know Bobbie?

ZOE

[Shaking hands with him]

Bobbie who?

MARGOT

Romford, dear.

ZOE

[*With a swift glance at MARGOT*]

Oh, yes, of course. I've heard of you.

MARGOT

What have you heard? You must tell me.

ZOE

I can't remember at the moment. Edward, give me a cigarette and a cocktail and tell me all about everything.

EDWARD

[*Ministering to her*]

Cigarette—cocktail—there.

ZOE

Thank you. Now then—

EDWARD

I don't know where to start any better than you do.

ZOE

How's Carol?

EDWARD

Awfully well.

ZOE

Where is she?

EDWARD

Out. She leads rather a hectic life I'm afraid—
matinées, bridge, mah-jong, dancing—

ZOE

You reel off those four harmless occupations as
though they were the most ignoble of human frailties.

EDWARD

I didn't mean to, really.

ZOE

They're wonderful *pis allers* for people who don't
do things.

EDWARD

I don't believe in *pis allers*.

ZOE

That's not a virtue; it's just part of your crea-
tive equipment.

MARGOT

I want to hear all about your travels, Zoe—where
you've been and who with.

ZOE

[*Laughing*]

It's difficult to remember accurately who I was with all the time. You may rest assured that I had an endless succession of lovers, beginning with an elderly mulatto in Honolulu and finishing with a retired matador in Seville.

EDWARD

I hope you're satisfied, Margot.

MARGOT

Don't be so annoying, Zoe. I really am frightfully interested.

ZOE

You always are, darling, in other people's affairs.

MARGOT

Naturally—they all sound so much more entertaining than my own. Did you see Jim anywhere about in Spain?

ZOE

Yes, in Barcelona. He'd just come in from a yachting cruise.

MARGOT

[*Eagerly*]

Who was with him? *Do* tell me!

ZOE

Nobody. I met him coming out of a bathroom at the Ritz.

MARGOT

Did he look more or less unattached?

ZOE

Yes. He seemed quite happy.

EDWARD

Margot's interest in her husband is so maternal, it always makes me feel as though I were in the presence of something sacred!

MARGOT

I'm awfully fond of Jim, really—particularly when he's on a yachting cruise.

ZOE

Are you definitely living apart now?

MARGOT

Oh yes—except for religious festivals like Easter and Christmas; then we forgather and go down to Draycott with the children.

EDWARD

[*Smiling*]

It seems a comfortable arrangement, doesn't it?

ZOE

Frightfully.

MARGOT

[*Reflectively*]

We could get a divorce, I suppose, but it would make such dreary complications. And then when you're free there's the awful danger of starting the whole thing over again with some one else.

ZOE

I haven't noticed it.

MARGOT

You will, I expect, dear—later on. [*She rises.*] I've enjoyed my nice cocktail very much, thank you, Edward. I must go now. Come and lunch on Thursday, Zoe darling. I've only got Rebecca coming. She'll adore seeing you again.

ZOE

All right. One-thirty?

MARGOT

Yes. Come along, Bobbie. Good-by, Edward. Give my love to Carol.

EDWARD

I will. Good bye.

BOBBIE

Good bye.

MARGOT

[*At door*]

You've come back from abroad a changed woman,
Zoe, if *that's* any comfort to you.

[*She and BOBBIE go out.*]

ZOE

What a sham Margot is, isn't she?

EDWARD

Not really. Just a type.

ZOE

Yes, but she's a type that couldn't exist unless surrounded by false values.

EDWARD

She's making the best of a bad job.

ZOE

She's letting everything slide—morals, dignity, and discretion. Thank Heaven, I broke away. I might have got like that.

EDWARD

I wonder if breaking away *is* such a very good plan.

ZOE

Of course it is. It's the most regenerating thing in the world.

EDWARD

You're so dashing, Zoe. Have another cigarette?

ZOE

[*Taking one*]

Thanks. I feel almost panic-stricken, you know.

EDWARD

Why?

ZOE

Coming back anywhere is always such a dreadful anti-climax.

EDWARD

Not such an anti-climax as staying still.

ZOE

To think that all this used to be my life before I let Kenneth divorce me.

EDWARD

It's pretty futile, isn't it?

ZOE

Futile! I return after a year's oblivion, thrilled and excited, longing to see all my old friends, and

what do I find? Clacking shallow nonentities doing the same things, saying the same things, thinking the same things. They're stale. They seem to have lost all wit and charm, and restraint—or perhaps they never had any. Oh dear! I've never felt so depressed in my life.

EDWARD

I hope I haven't let you down, too.

ZOE

No, Edward. You're unchanged; a little dim, perhaps.

EDWARD

Dim?

ZOE

Yes. All your vitality seems to have been snuffed out by something. I expect it's success. That's always frightfully undermining.

EDWARD

Yes, I suppose it is.

ZOE

Are you pleased with everything?

EDWARD

Naturally.

ZOE

I'm sorry.

EDWARD

Why? Oughtn't I to be?

ZOE

You oughtn't to pretend.

EDWARD

Pretend?

ZOE

Yes. You never used to—with me, anyhow.

EDWARD

One gets into the habit of accepting things at their surface value and not looking any deeper.

ZOE

It's a bad habit.

EDWARD

I must pretend. Don't you see?

ZOE

No.

EDWARD

I'm successful—prosperous. I've got everything I wanted.

ZOE

You haven't. You've merely got what other people think you wanted.

EDWARD

[*Smiling*]

You're wonderfully stimulating, Zoe—like a breath of Brighton air.

ZOE

You look as if you need stimulating, badly.

EDWARD

I do.

ZOE

I'm glad I came back now.

EDWARD

So am I. Devoutly glad.

ZOE

What's wrong?

EDWARD

Lots of things.

ZOE

Carol?

EDWARD

Yes.

ZOE

I thought so.

EDWARD

You were right from the first. It's been a dreary failure.

ZOE

I apologize. It's so irritating being right.

EDWARD

It doesn't irritate me in the least. With anyone else it would, perhaps. But you're different; you always have been.

ZOE

I know you better than most people.

EDWARD

I know you do.

ZOE

What has she been doing?

EDWARD

The obvious thing.

ZOE

I must say I consider marriage an overrated amusement.

EDWARD

I feel rather lost.

ZOE

Yes, I did, too—over Kenneth. It's a nasty feeling.

EDWARD

It's so difficult to know exactly the right attitude to adopt.

ZOE

Are you in love with her still?

EDWARD

I don't know, really. Not violently like at first—that's died down, naturally—but somehow—things get an awful hold on you, don't they?

ZOE

Yes, fortunately for the sanctity of home life.

EDWARD

But the hold ought to be mutual.

ZOE

Quite.

EDWARD

I have moments of fierce rage, you know; then it evaporates, leaving a dead sort of a calm.

ZOE

How long have you known?

EDWARD

Ages, subconsciously; definitely, only a few weeks.

ZOE

Does she know you know?

EDWARD

She hasn't the faintest suspicion. She's always been marvelously self-assured.

ZOE

She's a lovely creature—governed entirely by sex. That's why she's self-assured.

EDWARD

Will she always go on like this?

ZOE

I expect so. Anyhow, as long as she remains attractive—probably after. That's the penalty of her type.

EDWARD

It's beastly, isn't it?

ZOE

Yes, but quite inevitable, I'm afraid. You see she's got no intellect to provide ballast.

EDWARD

Poor Carol.

ZOE

I think you're the one to be considered most at the present moment.

EDWARD

Do you think I ought to have a scene with her about it? I shrink from that. It seems to double the humiliation.

ZOE

I honestly don't know what to say. She's been actually unfaithful to you?

EDWARD

Yes.

ZOE

Often?

EDWARD

[*Wearily*]

I suppose so. Harry Challoner is in possession at present.

ZOE

Oh dear! How typical.

EDWARD

Everything of that sort is made so much easier for people nowadays. I suppose it's an aftermath of the war.

ZOE

It's the obvious result of this “barriers down” phase through which we seem to be passing. Everyone is at close quarters with everyone else. There's no more glamour. Everything's indefinite and blurred except sex, so people are instinctively turning to that with a rather jaded vigor. It's pathetic when you begin to analyze it.

EDWARD

What fools they all are!

ZOE

[*Half smiling*]

Has being a success made you realize that?

EDWARD

Yes. There wasn't time before.

ZOE

Why don't you do what I did—go away?

EDWARD

It means sacrificing a good deal of work here in London. I've only just got my foot in, really.

ZOE

Divorce?

EDWARD

I don't feel equal to it at the moment—all the vile publicity, and the lascivious curiosity leveled at Carol and me. It makes me shudder to think of it.

ZOE

For a society portrait-painter you seem unduly sensitive.

EDWARD

If I felt vindictive toward Carol it would be so much easier. But I don't—I merely feel nauseated and frightfully, frightfully bored.

ZOE

The longer you allow it to drift, the worse it will become.

EDWARD

You think I ought to clinch it finally.

ZOE

Yes, I do. Once you've embarked you'll feel better.

EDWARD

No, I shan't.

ZOE

I believe you are still in love with her.

EDWARD

No; but I could be again if everything were all right. Oh, Zoe, I loathe this age and everything to do with it. Men of my sort are the products of over-civilization. All the red-blooded honest-to-God emotions have been squeezed out of us. We're incapable of hating enough or loving enough. When any big moment comes along, good or bad, we hedge round it, arguing, weighing it in the balance of reason and psychology, trying to readjust the values until there's nothing left and nothing achieved. I wish I were primitive enough to thrash Carol and drive her out of my life forever—or strong enough to hold her—but I'm not; I'm just an ass—an intelligent spineless ass!

[*He flings himself into a chair and takes a cigarette.*]

ZOE

All the same, being the product of an Age equips you for grappling with it. You've got more chance as you are than, say, Evie Bathurst, for instance.

EDWARD

Evie goes straight for what he wants and gets it.

ZOE

He doesn't demand as much as you.

EDWARD

He's a damned sight happier.

ZOE

I should imagine he misses a good deal.

EDWARD

What does that matter? This situation could never happen to him. He wouldn't let it.

ZOE

You mustn't place too much faith in the strong and silent, Edward. They crumple up quicker than any of us when confronted with something outside their very limited range.

EDWARD

You don't like Evie, do you?

ZOE

You forget I've been married to one of his species.

EDWARD

Evie's not a cad.

ZOE

How do you know?

EDWARD

He could never behave as foully as Kenneth.

ZOE

Kenneth was never anything but an honorable,
clean-living Englishman.

EDWARD

He divorced you.

ZOE

Only because I made him.

EDWARD

Why didn't he let you divorce him?

ZOE

It would have been bad for his military career.

EDWARD

You deliberately put yourself in the wrong.

ZOE

Yes.

EDWARD

And you really think it was worth while?

ZOE

Certainly I do. Our mutual boredom was verging on hatred—there was no hope of getting back, ever. What's the use of going on with a thing that's dead and done for? I decided to break free.

EDWARD

Is one really happier free?

ZOE

Don't be fatuous, Edward darling.

EDWARD

I don't think I have enough initiative to do anything definite like that.

ZOE

You don't need much initiative. All you've got to do is wait for your opportunity, and grab it!

[Enter BERRY.]

BERRY

[*Announcing*]

Major Bathurst.

[Enter EVELYN BATHURST. *He is tall, handsome, soldierly, and essentially masculine. His gaze is frank and correct.*]

[BERRY exits.]

EVELYN

Hullo, Edward! Zoe, I haven't seen you for years.

[They shake hands.]

ZOE

How are you, Evie?

EVELYN

Splendid! I feel awfully guilty, though. I meant to have written and sympathized over all your beastly divorce business. Will you forgive me?

ZOE

There's nothing to forgive. It was all a howling success, anyway.

EVELYN

Success! Whew! You must have had the hell of a time!

ZOE

It was unpleasant but illuminating.

EDWARD

Want a cocktail, Evie?

EVELYN

No, thanks.

EDWARD

Cigarette?

EVELYN

Rather—yes.

[*He takes one.*]

ZOE

How was India?

EVELYN

I don't know. I haven't been there.

ZOE

I'm so sorry. I thought you had.

EVELYN

No. Morocco was quite warm enough for me.

ZOE

You arrived at an opportune moment. We were just discussing you.

EVELYN

Good God! What for?

ZOE

Edward was wishing he were more like you.

EVELYN

That's uncommonly nice and right of him. Why this sudden burst of inferiority, Edward?

EDWARD

It's been brewing up for a long time.

EVELYN

[*Laughing*]

Oh, well, we all come to our senses sooner or later.

ZOE

Not always, Evie.

EVELYN

My only quarrel with Edward is he doesn't take enough exercise.

EDWARD

I'm not very good at exercise.

EVELYN

You never make any effort. Why don't you come and play squash with me sometimes?

EDWARD

That's not exercise, it's flagellation.

EVELYN

He's looking a bit off color, don't you think, Zoe?

ZOE

Only comparatively.

EVELYN

Been over-working, I suppose?

EDWARD

No, not really.

ZOE

[*Rising*]

I must go now, Edward.

EVELYN

I shall take it as a personal affront if you leave the moment I arrive.

ZOE

No, you won't, Evie. Good-by.

EVELYN

[*Shaking hands*]

Come and have a bit of food sometime.

ZOE

I should love to.

EVELYN

Where are you staying?

ZOE

Claridges.

EVELYN

Right. I'll call you up.

ZOE

Good-by, Edward.

EDWARD

Come again soon, please.

ZOE

Of course. Telephone me to-morrow morning.

EDWARD

I will.

ZOE

Give my love to Carol.

[EVELYN opens the door for her and she goes out.

EDWARD stands looking after her thoughtfully.]

EVELYN

[Sitting down again]

Extraordinary woman Zoe.

EDWARD

Why extraordinary?

EVELYN

I don't know. She's so self-assured.

EDWARD

[Absentely]

Yes. I think she has every reason to be.

EVELYN

She faced all that divorce business very pluckily. Kenneth seems to have behaved like a pretty average swine.

EDWARD

Yes.

EVELYN

Why on earth did she ever marry him?

EDWARD

[*Wearily*]

Why does anyone ever marry anyone?

EVELYN

I've never felt the urge very strongly. I suppose I've seen too much of it.

EDWARD

That doesn't make any difference, really.

EVELYN

Women are so damned complicated to live with—specially Zoe's sort.

EDWARD

I don't think Zoe is particularly complicated. She's always appeared to me to be pretty clear-headed and direct.

EVELYN

Oh well, you know her better than I do.

EDWARD

You're wonderfully single-minded, aren't you?

EVELYN

Single-minded?

EDWARD

Yes. You live according to formulated codes, and you never try to look either under or over them. I do envy you.

EVELYN

You needn’t. I have my ups and downs.

EDWARD

Do you, really? Ever since we were at school I’ve always regarded you as being quite invulnerable.

EVELYN

[*Complacently*]

Don’t be a fool, old man.

EDWARD

I suppose it’s a remnant of hero worship.

EVELYN

Rot! I’m a bit more balanced than you, that’s all.

EDWARD

That wouldn’t be very difficult.

EVELYN

I came here to-day with a purpose. I’m a bit worried. I want to talk to you seriously.

EDWARD

What about?

EVELYN

Lots of things.

EDWARD

All right. Go on.

EVELYN

I don't know how to start, quite; it's difficult.

EDWARD

Why difficult?

EVELYN

Well, you're a bit touchy at times, aren't you?

EDWARD

What's the matter, Evie?

EVELYN

Nothing actually yet—at least, I hope not.

EDWARD

I know what you're driving at.

EVELYN

Do you?

EDWARD

Yes.

EVELYN

Are you sure you do?

EDWARD

People have been talking about Carol, I suppose.

EVELYN

Exactly.

EDWARD

Well, you needn’t worry.

EVELYN

I shouldn’t, ordinarily, but somehow in this case it’s different.

EDWARD

No, it isn’t; it’s exactly the same; it’s a situation that occurs over and over again with everybody. That’s why it’s such a bore.

EVELYN

That’s a silly sort of attitude to take up.

EDWARD

No sillier than any other.

EVELYN

Aren’t you going to do anything?

EDWARD

O God!

[*He turns away.*]

EVELYN

Well, you’ll have to sooner or later.

EDWARD

What is there to do?

EVELYN

Read the riot act.

EDWARD

Do you seriously imagine that that’s in any way a final solution?

EVELYN

It ought to bring her to her senses a bit, if you did it with conviction.

EDWARD

That’s the trouble. I haven’t got a conviction.

EVELYN

Hang it all man, she is your wife!

EDWARD

I'm not a man of property.

EVELYN

How do you mean?

EDWARD

I mean I can't look on Carol as a sort of American trunk.

EVELYN

[*Exasperated*]

What *are* you talking about?

EDWARD

She's a human being, not an inanimate object over which I can assert legal rights.

EVELYN

If all husbands adopted that tone, England would be in a nice state.

EDWARD

It *is* in a nice state.

EVELYN

You make me tired sometimes, Edward.

EDWARD

I expect I do, but it can't be helped.

EVELYN

Yes, it can.

EDWARD

How?

EVELYN

Pull yourself together; show a little spirit.

EDWARD

I suppose you think that if I grabbed Carol by the hair of the head and banged her about and hurled abuse at her, she'd fall at my feet in ecstasies of adoration?

EVELYN

I shouldn't be surprised. Anyhow, it probably would do her good.

EDWARD

For an upstanding British soldier you have an astounding sense of the theater.

EVELYN

Oh, you can think me a red-blooded savage if you like, but I'm damned if I'd sit down quietly and let my wife make a fool of me.

EDWARD

[*Gently*]

You haven't got a wife, Evie. If you had you'd probably be utterly vanquished quicker than anyone.

EVELYN

Not me. I know the game too well.

EDWARD

Only from looking on, though. That makes an enormous difference.

EVELYN

Look here, Edward. Why not be sensible about all this?

EDWARD

I am, really.

EVELYN

Nonsense!

EDWARD

It's no use, Evie. Things will have to take their course.

EVELYN

[*Contemptuously*]

Line of least resistance, eh?

EDWARD

Yes.

EVELYN

To hell with the line of least resistance.

EDWARD

She can't help herself ; she's made like that.

EVELYN

Rubbish !

EDWARD

It isn't rubbish. She's the sort of woman who must attract people all the time. One conquest isn't enough ; she must go on and on.

EVELYN

You talk as though she were only just flirting about for the fun of the thing.

EDWARD

Perhaps she is.

EVELYN

What's the use of blinding yourself?

EDWARD

Oh, shut up, Evie !

EVELYN

This is more serious than you think.

EDWARD

No, it isn't.

EVELYN

What do you feel—honestly?

EDWARD

I've told you—bored.

EVELYN

That's not true.

EDWARD

All right.

EVELYN

I know it isn't. We haven't been pals all these years for nothing. You can't deceive me as easily as that.

EDWARD

What do you want me to feel, exactly?

EVELYN

You've got to *do* something.

EDWARD

What?

EVELYN

If you don’t, I shall.

EDWARD

Evie, if you mention one word of all this to Carol or anyone in the world, I’ll never forgive you.

EVELYN

You needn’t worry. I’ve got a better plan than talking.

EDWARD

What is it?

EVELYN

Leave it to me.

EDWARD

Evie—

EVELYN

She ought to be taught a lesson.

EDWARD

What sort of lesson?

EVELYN

She wants some of the self-assurance knocked out of her.

EDWARD

[*Smiling*]

Really, Evie!

EVELYN

She needs humiliating.

EDWARD

You're positively vindictive.

EVELYN

Perhaps I am, but it's for your sake.

EDWARD

I'd no idea you disliked Carol so heartily.

EVELYN

It isn't that at all. I don't like or dislike her. She never pays attention to me, anyhow.

EDWARD

To think that there's even a streak of feminine in you!

EVELYN

What do you mean?

EDWARD

Never mind.

EVELYN

I won't stand by and see you let down all along the line.

EDWARD

It's awfully sweet of you, Evie, to be so cross, but you really mustn't be. I'm the one to get cross if necessary.

EVELYN

It is necessary.

EDWARD

You must allow me to be the best judge of that.

EVELYN

Now look here, Edward—

EDWARD

Remember what I said—you're not to interfere. It's my affair, and mine alone.

EVELYN

I know a good deal more about women than you.

EDWARD

Do you, Evie?

EVELYN

I've handled too many of them not to.

EDWARD

How mechanical that sounds.

[*He laughs.*]

EVELYN

Oh, you're hopeless.

[*The door opens and CAROL comes in. She is, as usual, looking delightful.*]

CAROL

Hallo, Evie! [She shakes hands with him.] Are there any telephone messages for me, Edward?

EDWARD

No.

CAROL

[*Taking off her gloves*]

I'm quite exhausted.

EDWARD

Where have you been?

CAROL

Playing mah-jong with Fanny. I won a good deal.

EVELYN

Splendid.

CAROL

How's Margot's picture going?

EDWARD

It's nearly finished.

CAROL

Give me a cigarette, Evie.

EVELYN

[*Handing her a cigarette*]

You look remarkably fit, Carol.

CAROL

[*Smiling*]

I am fit, but I'm a tiny bit worried over Edward.

EVELYN

Why, he looks all right to me.

CAROL

You don't know him like I do. I can always tell when he's tired and overworked, can't I, darling?

EDWARD

Yes, I'm sure you can.

CAROL

It's all these people buzzing round him all day.
Let's go away, Edward, and have a real holiday—
somewhere quiet.

EVELYN

That's a damned good idea.

EDWARD

[*Smiling*]

I can't—for the next six weeks, anyhow.

CAROL

[*With a slight shrug*]

There you see? It's quite impossible to do anything with him.

EVELYN

Why don't you chuck everything, and just go?

EDWARD

Funnily enough, Zoe suggested that this afternoon.

CAROL

Zoe? I didn't know she was back.

EDWARD

She arrived yesterday.

CAROL

Why didn't you tell me?

EDWARD

I didn't know until this morning. She rang me up.

CAROL

Well, she didn't lose much time anyhow.

EDWARD

I don't see why she should.

CAROL

I suppose she talked and talked and talked as usual.

EDWARD

Yes, we both talked a good bit.

CAROL

What about?

EDWARD

Everything.

CAROL

No wonder you look tired.

EVELYN

She looked awfully well.

CAROL

She always does. She's wonderfully healthy.

EDWARD

[*With faint malice*]
She sent you her love.

CAROL

[*Bored*]
Oh—give her mine when she rings up again.

EDWARD

You'll see her to-night at the Harringtons'.

CAROL

No, I shan't. I'm not going. They're going to have that awful string quartette again. I suffered so acutely last time.

EDWARD

I shall go by myself, then.

CAROL

Never mind. You'll be able to talk to Zoe.

EDWARD

Where are you dining?

CAROL

With the Challoners at the Embassy; then we're going on somewhere.

EDWARD

Do you want the car?

CAROL

No. They're picking me up.

EDWARD

Right. I'll go and dress. Don't go, Evie. We might have a slight aperitif at one of your disreputable clubs before dinner.

CAROL

Are you dining together?

EDWARD

No. I'm going to the Russian Ballet with Richard and Sheila. They've got a box or something.

[EDWARD goes off into his bedroom.]

EVELYN

You're looking charming, Carol.

CAROL

[Raising her eyebrows]

Thank you,

EVELYN

That's a splendid hat. Is it new?

CAROL

No—incredibly old.

EVELYN

Well, it doesn't look it.

CAROL

I'm glad.

[*She goes toward the door.*]

EVELYN

Carol—

CAROL

[*Turning*]

Yes?

EVELYN

Nothing.

CAROL

[*Surprised*]

Is there anything the matter?

EVELYN

No—honestly it's nothing.

CAROL

Oh well, I must go and dress, too. See you later on.

EVELYN

I shall be gone when you come down.

CAROL

Really, Evie, you're behaving very strangely.

EVELYN

Why?

CAROL

I don't know. You seem different, somehow.

EVELYN

Won't you stay and talk for a moment. I haven't seen you to speak to for ages.

CAROL

That's your fault.

EVELYN

You're always so engaged.

CAROL

I never seem to have a minute for anything. I do wish life wasn't so hectic.

EVELYN

Why do you let it be?

CAROL

I don't. It just happens like that.

EVELYN

I'd resent it a good deal if you were my wife.

CAROL

[*Smiling*]

Aren't you glad I'm not, Evie?

EVELYN

I don't know.

CAROL

[*Surprised*]

Well, now! I thought you disliked me thoroughly!

EVELYN

Disliked you?

CAROL

Yes. You always have such a polite preoccupied air with me. It makes me feel terribly frivolous and shallow.

EVELYN

How can you, Carol?

CAROL

[*Gayly*]

It's true. You're the kind of man who despises women dreadfully—I know you are.

EVELYN

You're quite wrong. I adore them.

CAROL

Well, that's a lovely surprise, isn't it?

EVELYN

I can't get over you imagining that I disliked you.

CAROL

I expect it's because you're so tremendously fond of Edward. One always feels that with one's husband's friends.

EVELYN

I don't see any reason, just because I like Edward, that——

CAROL

Don't you, Evie?

EVELYN

Of course not.

CAROL

Well, I'm very, very glad.

EVELYN

That's settled, then, isn't it?

CAROL

Quite. I shan't be frightened of you any more.

EVELYN

Frightened of me! How ridiculous!

CAROL

It isn't ridiculous; it's quite natural.

EVELYN

I don't see why. I'm perfectly harmless.

CAROL

Are you?

EVELYN

Mild as a kitten.

CAROL

I wonder.

EVELYN

To think you've been building up the most frightful image of me in your mind all this time and I never knew.

CAROL

You can't blame me, really.

EVELYN

Yes, I can. It's awfully suspicious and distrustful of you.

CAROL

It's your own fault, for holding so aloof.

EVELYN

I don't hold aloof a bit.

CAROL

You've never talked anything but commonplaces to me ever since I've known you.

EVELYN

You never gave me the chance.

CAROL

What did you expect me to do?

EVELYN

I don't know. Just be nice.

CAROL

Haven't I been nice? I'm so sorry.

EVELYN

Yes, I suppose you have, really, but I've always felt you thought me rather dull.

CAROL

You have been—up to now.

EVELYN

[*Despondently*]

There you are, then!

CAROL

[*Quietly*]

I said "up to now."

EVELYN

Men of my sort are all wrong in society. We don't seem to fit in, somehow.

CAROL

Are you glad or sorry?

EVELYN

Well, to be frank, I'm glad, until moments like this crop up.

CAROL

You're awfully funny, you know.

EVELYN

Funny?

CAROL

Yes. You do despise women, after all.

EVELYN

How do you mean?

CAROL

You think we only like men who play up and talk well and dance well.

EVELYN

It's only natural that you should.

CAROL

Oh no, it isn't.

EVELYN

You think there's some hope for me, after all, then?

CAROL

Now you're fishing.

EVELYN

It's cruel of you to snap me up like that.

CAROL

I'm sorry, Evie.

EVELYN

You'd find me a fearful bore after a bit, you know.

CAROL

Why should I?

EVELYN

I take things so damned seriously.

CAROL

That's refreshing! Most of the men I know don't take things seriously enough.

EVELYN

What an extraordinary woman you are!

CAROL

Why extraordinary?

EVELYN

Making me talk like this. I never have before.

CAROL

I shall take that as a compliment, whether you like it or not.

EVELYN

I mean it.

CAROL

Yes, I know you do.

EVELYN

I see now why your life's so hectic and why everyone runs after you so much.

CAROL

[*Smiling*]

Why?

EVELYN

You've got the most amazing knack of drawing people out.

CAROL

Not always. Only people I like.

EVELYN

You've made me feel lonely for the first time in my life.

CAROL

How hateful of me!

EVELYN

It's not your fault; it's mine.

CAROL

In what way?

EVELYN

I ought to make more efforts and not be so boorish.

CAROL

You're not in the least boorish.

EVELYN

Yes, I am—utterly wrapped up in my own affairs, then suddenly some one like you comes along and makes me realize all in a minute what a lot I'm missing.

CAROL

You're not missing much, really. It's much better to remain yourself than try to be something you're not.

EVELYN

It's awfully sweet of you to say that.

CAROL

I mean it honestly. You never can guess how tired I get by having the same sort of things said to me always.

EVELYN

Do you really?

CAROL

Of course.

EVELYN

I wish you weren't dining out to-night.

CAROL

Why?

EVELYN

I'd like better than anything in the world for you to come and dine with me quietly.

CAROL

I'd adore to, Evie, but, you see—

EVELYN

Oh, I know you can't possibly; but it seems hard that the moment I begin to get to know you properly you're whisked out of sight again.

CAROL

[Gently]

There are lots of other nights.

EVELYN

Yes, I suppose there are.

CAROL

I'm certainly not frightened of you any more now —you're an absolute baby.

EVELYN

Crying for the moon?

CAROL

I don't rate myself quite so high as that.

EVELYN

You're just as unattainable.

CAROL

Evie!

EVELYN

I'm sorry. I oughtn't to have said that.

CAROL

[*After a slight pause*]

I don't mind.

EVELYN

You are a dear.

CAROL

Am I?

EVELYN

May I ring you up to-morrow morning?

CAROL

Of course.

EVELYN

And perhaps—some time soon—?

CAROL

[*With determination*]

I'll dine with you to-night, Evie.

EVELYN

Carol!

CAROL

Yes. I can put off the Challoners. They bore me stiff, anyway. I'd much rather talk to you.

EVELYN

I say, it's most terribly sweet of you to take pity on me like this.

CAROL

Don't be silly. It'll be a mutual benefit. I'm bored and you're bored. Where shall we dine?

EVELYN

Anywhere you choose.

CAROL

The awful thing is I simply daren't go anywhere where I'm likely to be seen.

EVELYN

We could dine at the flat if you like, but it will be fearfully dull.

CAROL

Oh, *let's* do that. And we can creep out somewhere afterward if we feel like it.

EVELYN

Are you sure that's all right?

CAROL

Positive. It will be divine being quiet for once.

EVELYN

Don't say anything to Edward.

CAROL

[*Quickly*]

Why not?

EVELYN

Well, I got out of dining with him to-night. I wanted to be by myself, you see.

CAROL

Well, you're not going to be now.

EVELYN

I know. Isn't it damnable?

CAROL

Beastly. Will you fetch me?

EVELYN

Yes. What time?

CAROL

Latish—about nine.

EVELYN

Splendid—

[Enter EDWARD in evening dress.]

CAROL

You have been quick.

EDWARD

I've hurried. I know how impatient Evie is. Are you quite determined about the Harringtons, Carol?

CAROL

Quite! I simply couldn't bear it.

EDWARD

Oh, all right, then. I'll apologize for you.

CAROL

Do, there's a dear. Good-by, Evie. Come and see me again soon.

EVELYN

Thanks. I will.

EDWARD

Come on. I haven't got much time. Good-night, Carol.

CAROL

Good-night, darling.

[EDWARD and EVELYN go off. CAROL lights a cigarette and goes to the telephone.]

CAROL

[At telephone]

Mayfair 7,065 please. . . . Yes. [A pause] Hallo! Is that you, Fay. . . . Yes. Can I speak to Harry? Oh yes, rather. I'll hold on. . . . Harry. . . . Yes, it's me. Look here, I can't dine to-night, because I can't, I feel too tired. I may not have looked tired this afternoon, but I tell you I am now. . . . Don't be so annoying, Harry. . . . No, it isn't that at all. I'm going to dine in bed. . . . No, don't. I shall probably be asleep. . . . Well, of course, if you're going to talk like that. . . . I'm afraid you're developing into a bore, Harry. I'm so sorry! [She bangs down the receiver.] Silly fool!

[She picks up her bag and gloves and goes off.]

CURTAIN

“THIS WAS A MAN”

Act Two

ACT II

The scene is EVELYN BATHURST's flat. It is a manly apartment, furnished with precision but no imagination. There is a door up left opening into a small hall and thence to the front door. Up right is EVIE's bedroom and down left a service door. Between these two is the fireplace, in front of which is a large sofa and a couple of armchairs. The windows occupy the right wall. The table, center, is laid for two.

[*When the curtain rises, it is about 9.15 p.m. and BLACKWELL is putting the finishing touches, which consist of a bowl of roses and a bottle of champagne in an ice bucket. He is regarding his handiwork pensively when there comes the sound of a key in the front door. After a moment EVELYN and CAROL enter. EVELYN is wearing a dinner jacket; CAROL, an elaborately simple dinner dress and cloak.]*

CAROL

What a nice flat!

EVELYN

I've been here for years.

CAROL

It's all quite typical of you.

EVELYN

How do you know?

CAROL

Well, don't you think it is?

EVELYN

I've never thought about it much.

CAROL

Solid and rather austere.

EVELYN

That sounds beastly.

CAROL

No. I like it.

EVELYN

I'm glad. Let me take your cloak. [*He takes her cloak and lays it over a chair.*] Cocktails please, Blackwell.

BLACKWELL

Yes, sir.

[*He goes off.*]

CAROL

I suppose he's been with you as long as the flat?

EVELYN

Longer, really; he was my batman when I was a raw subaltern.

CAROL

[*Smiling*]

You must have been rather nice as a subaltern.

EVELYN

Oh no, I wasn't. You ask Edward.

CAROL

Edward adores you.

EVELYN

We're very old friends.

CAROL

It's always puzzled me. You're so very different from each other.

EVELYN

Edward's a damn sight cleverer.

CAROL

Now then—

EVELYN

But he is.

CAROL

You seem to have done very well at your job and you're always winning things.

EVELYN

I haven't done anything.

CAROL

Nonsense. [*She wanders round the room, looking at photographs.*] Who's this?

EVELYN

Mary Liddle. I was engaged to her once.

CAROL

Oh, I see.

EVELYN

I suppose you want to know why nothing ever came of it.

CAROL

Of course.

EVELYN

She ran off with some one she hardly knew.

CAROL

What a shame!

EVELYN

I expect I bored her stiff—

CAROL

Were you very much in love with her?

EVELYN

Yes. I think I was.

CAROL

I can't imagine you in love.

EVELYN

It doesn't happen often.

CAROL

[*Smiling and patting his arm*]

Never mind, Evie.

EVELYN

I don't. It's a relief really.

[*BLACKWELL enters with the cocktails; they both take them.*]

EVELYN

Dinner please, Blackwell.

BLACKWELL

Very good, sir.

[*He goes out.*]

CAROL

[*At another photograph*]

Is this your mother?

EVELYN

Yes.

CAROL

You're awfully like her.

EVELYN

It's the nose, I think.

CAROL

And the chin—so firm and unrelenting. I love
firm chins.

EVELYN

They're awfully deceptive.

CAROL

[*Sipping her cocktail*]

Are they, Evie?

EVELYN

Yes. I'm as weak as water, really.

CAROL

You'll have to prove it to me before I believe it.

EVELYN

I'd rather not.

[BLACKWELL enters with caviare.]

EVELYN

Come and sit down.

CAROL

[Sitting at table]

What divine roses!

EVELYN

They're in your honor.

CAROL

Thank you. I hoped they were.

[BLACKWELL helps her to caviare.]

EVELYN

[Opening champagne]

I feel awfully flattered at your being here.

CAROL

Why should you?

EVELYN

I just do.

CAROL

Don't be silly. [*He fills her glass and his own.*] Thanks.

EVELYN

I feel flattered because it's something I never thought possible.

CAROL

Me dining with you?

EVELYN

Yes.

CAROL

Idiot.

[*She smiles.*]

EVELYN

I've always seen you as a frightfully dazzling creature—always in demand—always rushing about.

CAROL

Just because you feel flattered yourself, you mustn't begin to flatter me.

EVELYN

Is that flattery?

CAROL

Isn't it?

EVELYN

Well yes, and no.

CAROL

You mean you've never quite approved of me.

EVELYN

I didn't say that.

CAROL

I believe it's true, all the same.

EVELYN

I've wondered a bit what you were really like.

CAROL

[*With subtle pathos*]

I don't think I know, myself.

EVELYN

You haven't had much time to think, have you?

CAROL

No—I suppose not.

EVELYN

[*Sententiously*]

We're all so different underneath.

CAROL

[*Laughing*]

Oh, Evie!

EVELYN

What?

CAROL

You're awfully serious.

EVELYN

Don't laugh at me.

CAROL

I wasn't.

EVELYN

I don't mind, really ; it shows that you're enjoying yourself.

CAROL

I am thoroughly.

EVELYN

I was terrified that you'd be bored.

CAROL

You're fishing again.

EVELYN

I wish you weren’t so quick ; it embarrasses me.
[*He laughs.*]

CAROL

I’ll try to be slower.
[*She laughs too.*]

EVELYN

I’m the plodding sort, you know—gets there in
the end, but takes a long time about it.

CAROL

Nonsense !

EVELYN

The British army doesn’t specialize in wit.

CAROL

I won’t hear a word against the British army.

EVELYN

[*With jocularity*]
Hurrah!
[*They both laugh.*]

CAROL

You’re like a schoolboy.

EVELYN

I feel one with you.

CAROL

Do I look so terribly old?

EVELYN

You know I didn't mean that.

CAROL

I'll let you off this time, but you mustn't do it again.

[BLACKWELL enters with the soup; he takes away the caviare plates.]

EVELYN

How long is it since you dined quietly like this?

CAROL

Oh, ages.

EVELYN

I thought so.

CAROL

You're looking disapproving again.

[BLACKWELL serves the soup and exits.]

EVELYN

I think I'm envious.

CAROL

Envious?

EVELYN

Yes.

CAROL

No, you're not, really.

EVELYN

Your life would never suit me, I know, but somehow it does sound rather fun, for a change.

CAROL

Let's make a bargain.

EVELYN

I know what you're going to say.

CAROL

Change over for a bit.

EVELYN

Temptress.

CAROL

You come out to a few theaters and parties with
me—

EVELYN

I can't dance well enough.

CAROL

I'll soon teach you.

EVELYN

I'd drive you mad.

CAROL

Have you a gramophone here?

EVELYN

Yes.

CAROL

We'll start after dinner.

EVELYN

All right.

CAROL

And whenever I'm tired and sick of everything, I'll come here and dine quietly like this.

EVELYN

Will you, honestly?

CAROL

Of course, if you stick to your side of the compact.

EVELYN

I don't believe you'll have the patience to carry it through.

CAROL

You must despise me.

EVELYN

Despise you? Good Heavens! Why?

CAROL

You're so untrusting.

EVELYN

No, I'm not; but it does look as though I were going to get more out of this than you.

CAROL

Not at all. It's a perfectly fair exchange. You've no idea how utterly weary I get every now and then.

EVELYN

Poor Carol.

CAROL

This is peace, absolute peace, and I'm tremendously grateful to you for it.

[*They look at each other in silence for a moment.*

EVELYN's expression is faintly nonplused.]

EVELYN

The compact's on.

CAROL

Good! Shake hands.

EVELYN

Right you are.

[They shake hands across the table. CAROL allows hers to remain in his a shade more than is strictly necessary.]

CAROL

Do you want to come to the first night of “Round Pegs” on Thursday?

EVELYN

What on earth’s that?

CAROL

A new play by Burton Trask.

EVELYN

Who’s he?

CAROL

[*Laughing*]

Oh, Evie!

EVELYN

Well, how should I know?

CAROL

He’s only the most talked of dramatist we’ve got.

EVELYN

Sorry.

CAROL

He wrote "The Sinful Spinster."

EVELYN

Oh, the play all the fuss was about last year.

CAROL

Yes.

EVELYN

It sounded pretty hot stuff.

CAROL

It wasn't, really, but the woman in it fell in love with a man younger than herself and the Church of England didn't like it.

EVELYN

Oh, I see!

CAROL

You need educating badly.

EVELYN

I'm afraid I do.

[BLACKWELL enters and takes away their soup plates.]

CAROL

Wasn’t it funny us talking this afternoon and you asking me to dine all in a minute?

EVELYN

Awfully funny, but very lucky for me.

CAROL

You make me feel shy when you say things like that. It was just as lucky for me.

EVELYN

[*With intensity*]

Was it, honestly?

CAROL

[*Looking down*]

Of course.

[BLACKWELL enters with partridges and attendant vegetables. He serves them during the ensuing dialogue.]

EVELYN

Edward’s looking awfully tired these days.

CAROL

[*Absently*]

Is he? I haven’t noticed it.

EVELYN

Why, you said so yourself this afternoon.

CAROL

So I did. I remember he looked very wan when I came in. By the way, what were you two discussing so intently. I felt as though I were interrupting a Masonic meeting.

EVELYN

Nothing particular.

CAROL

Me, by any chance?

EVELYN

Good Heavens, no!

CAROL

There's no need to be so vehement about it; it wouldn't have mattered if you had been.

EVELYN

Have some more champagne.

CAROL

Thanks—just a little.

[*She holds out her glass and he fills it, also his own.*]

EVELYN

[*With great boldness*]

Why did you think we were talking about you?

CAROL

You both looked so guilty.

EVELYN

Surely that proves we weren't.

CAROL

Very good, Evie.

EVELYN

You're embarrassing me dreadfully.

CAROL

Am I? Why?

EVELYN

Because we *were* discussing you.

CAROL

Ah!

EVELYN

I see it's useless to try and deceive you for a moment.

CAROL

What were you saying?

EVELYN

Must I tell you?

CAROL

Certainly.

EVELYN

You're terribly unrelenting.

CAROL

Come on—out with it.

EVELYN

I was lecturing Edward.

[BLACKWELL *goes out.*]

CAROL

Lecturing him?

EVELYN

Yes. I said he was paying too much attention to his work and not enough to you.

CAROL

And do you think that's true?

EVELYN

Yes.

CAROL

It isn't; it's the other way round, really. I neglect Edward. You should have saved your lecture for me.

EVELYN

I'm sure it's his fault, really, he's so damned lack-adaisical.

CAROL

It was nice of you, but a little interfering.

EVELYN

I'm sorry. I suppose I deserve to be snubbed.

CAROL

I'm not snubbing you, exactly, but I'm puzzled.

EVELYN

Why puzzled?

CAROL

It seems so strange that you should have taken up the cudgels on my side.

EVELYN

That was how I saw the situation.

CAROL

I never realized there was a situation.

EVELYN

There isn't, but there may be soon.

CAROL

How horrid of you!

EVELYN

I know Edward pretty well, you know.

CAROL

And me hardly at all.

EVELYN

Exactly. That's why I went to him, as I told you this afternoon. I always felt that you disliked me and thought me dull.

CAROL

How absurd!

EVELYN

You did, all the same. You'd have crushed me to the earth if I'd dared mention the subject to you.

CAROL

You must have thought me a prig.

EVELYN

Not in the least. I quite saw your point.

CAROL

And now—?

EVELYN

Now I'm muddled.

CAROL

Have I muddled you, Evie?

EVELYN

Yes, terribly.

CAROL

I'm so glad.

EVELYN

That's malicious of you.

CAROL

Go ahead with your lecture.

EVELYN

Certainly not.

CAROL

Whose fault do you consider this slight drifting apart—Edward's or mine?

EVELYN

Edward's.

CAROL

I told you it was mine.

EVELYN

I don't believe you.

CAROL

Stubborn.

EVELYN

Is it yours?

CAROL

Yes.

EVELYN

Why?

CAROL

[*Seriously*]

Oh, Evie—

EVELYN

Tell me.

CAROL

It's rather difficult.

EVELYN

I'm awfully sympathetic.

CAROL

I believe you are.

EVELYN

You love him still, don't you?

CAROL

Yes—in a way.

EVELYN

But not so much as you did?

CAROL

Not quite so much.

EVELYN

I suppose that's inevitable in married life, always.

CAROL

I expect it is.

EVELYN

It's sad, though.

CAROL

Not if one isn't sentimental about it.

EVELYN

Are you ever sentimental about anything?

CAROL

[*Wistfully*]

Do I seem so hard?

EVELYN

A little, I think.

CAROL

I'm not, really.

EVELYN

I'm afraid Edward's unhappy.

CAROL

Not deep down inside.

EVELYN

Are you sure?

CAROL

He may think he is.

EVELYN

Poor Edward.

CAROL

He doesn't love me quite so much, either, you know.

EVELYN

Perhaps he wants to, but you won't let him.

CAROL

Evie, why are we talking like this?

EVELYN

I don't know.

CAROL

I can't bear to pretend about things.

EVELYN

You're quite right; it doesn't pay in the long run.

CAROL

But I don't want you to blame Edward and lecture him for something that's not entirely his fault.

EVELYN

I see.

CAROL

I'm awfully fond of him and I always shall be, but—

EVELYN

But what?

CAROL

Don't let's say any more about it.

EVELYN

All right. You're rather a dear, you know.

CAROL

Am I?

EVELYN

More than I ever suspected!

CAROL

Oh, Evie!

[They look at each other for a moment, EVELYN intently, CAROL with a faintly wistful smile. BLACKWELL enters to collect the plates and serve the sweet—*pêche Melba*—which he does during ensuing dialogue.]

EVELYN

You don't like Zoe St. Merryn, do you?

CAROL

Why do you suddenly ask that?

EVELYN

I felt you didn't this afternoon.

CAROL

She's rather obvious, I think.

EVELYN

In what way?

CAROL

She tries to be clever.

EVELYN

I always thought she was clever.

CAROL

Yes, most men do, but very few women.

EVELYN

Why is that?

CAROL

Because they see through her. All that divorce business was a put-up job.

EVELYN

I say, Carol!

CAROL

Don't look so shocked. Of course it was. She's been so brave and defiant over it. Men love that.

EVELYN

Aren't you being a little hard on her?

CAROL

No, not really. I know her type so well.

EVELYN

She's an old friend of Edward's, isn't she?

CAROL

Yes, but that hasn't anything to do with it. She tried to marry him once.

EVELYN

He seems very fond of her.

CAROL

She flatters him terribly. He's an awful baby.

EVELYN

Thank Heaven I haven't got your feminine intuition. It must complicate life dreadfully.

CAROL

It's very useful sometimes.

EVELYN

Do you size everyone up so mercilessly.

CAROL

[*Laughing*]

Perhaps.

EVELYN

I'm trembling visibly.

CAROL

Nonsense! You're not frightened by anything, really.

EVELYN

You don't know!
[BLACKWELL *goes out.*]

CAROL

Well, you shouldn't be, anyhow.

EVELYN

That's different.

CAROL

Why did you ask me not to tell Edward I was dining with you?

EVELYN

[*Nonplused*]
Did I?

CAROL

You know you did.

EVELYN

Perhaps I was afraid he'd think I was interfering again.

CAROL

Did he tell you that, too?

EVELYN

Yes.

CAROL

[*Smiling*]

Never mind.

EVELYN

I don't. I'm used to Edward.

CAROL

So am I.

EVELYN

But when you tell me I'm interfering, I feel beastly.

CAROL

You are, you know.

EVELYN

There! You've done it again.

CAROL

People like Edward and me should be left to manage our own troubles.

EVELYN

All right. From now on I won't say a word.

CAROL

Cheer up.

EVELYN

I'm a blundering fool, anyhow.

CAROL

[*Laughing*]

Yes.

EVELYN

And instead of making you like me, I've made you
laugh at me.

CAROL

That's not quite true.

EVELYN

I'm afraid it is.

CAROL

You don't know a bit what I'm really like.

EVELYN

No.

CAROL

Do you want to?

EVELYN

Yes.

CAROL

I'm not sure that it's wise.

EVELYN

Why not?

CAROL

You might be shocked.

EVELYN

As bad as that?

CAROL

Yes—as bad as that.

EVELYN

I don't believe it.

CAROL

Good.

EVELYN

You're too sensitive to behave really badly.

CAROL

That's nonsense.

EVELYN

No, it isn't.

CAROL

Sensitiveness hasn't anything to do with it.

EVELYN

Yes, it has.

CAROL

Don't contradict me.

EVELYN

[*With truculence*]

Why shouldn't I?

CAROL

Because it infuriates me.

EVELYN

[*Slowly*]

We're almost quarreling.

CAROL

Yes.

EVELYN

I'm sorry.

CAROL

Antagonism is a bad sign.

EVELYN

What do you mean?

CAROL

[*Suddenly burying her face in her hands*]
Oh, Evie!

EVELYN

[*Alarmed*]

What on earth's the matter?

CAROL

[*Muffled*]

Nothing.

EVELYN

Carol, don't—please—

[*He gets up and comes to her.*]

CAROL

No, no. Sit down. Your man will be in in a moment.

EVELYN

Do tell me what's wrong.

CAROL

Sit down, please.

EVELYN

All right.

[*He sits down.*]

CAROL

Give me my bag, will you? It's over there. I want to powder my nose.

[EVELYN rises. *When his back is toward her, an expression of extreme satisfaction flits across CAROL's face. By the time he has turned she is once again bravely melancholy.*]]

EVELYN

Here.

[*He gives her her bag.*]]

CAROL

Thank you.

[*She looks up at him with a weary smile. BLACKWELL enters and takes away the remains of the sweet.*]]

EVELYN

Serve the coffee at once, Blackwell; then I shan't want you any more.

BLACKWELL

Very good, sir.

[*He goes out.*]]

CAROL

I feel better now.

EVELYN

I don't suppose you'll ever want to dine with me again.

CAROL

Don't be silly. Of course I shall.

EVELYN

I seem to have depressed you terribly.

CAROL

No—it's not your fault, really.

EVELYN

I wish I understood you a bit better.

CAROL

I'm glad you don't.

[BLACKWELL enters with coffee and liqueurs, which he places beside EVELYN.]

EVELYN

Thank you, Blackwell. Good night.

BLACKWELL

Good night, sir.

[He goes out.]

EVELYN

Coffee?

CAROL

Yes, please.

EVELYN

[*Pouring it out*]

Sugar?

CAROL

One.

EVELYN

[*Handing it to her*]

There. Cointreau or brandy?

CAROL

Cointreau—just a little.

EVELYN

The brandy's very good.

CAROL

All right. Brandy, then—you're so dominant.

EVELYN

Don't laugh at me any more.

CAROL

I must a little.

EVELYN

Here you are.

[*He gives her some brandy and takes some himself.*]

CAROL

Next time I come I'll try to be more amusing.

EVELYN

I don't want you to be amusing if you don't feel like it.

CAROL

You're awfully kind and gentle.

EVELYN

I want you to relax completely.

CAROL

I am relaxing completely.

EVELYN

I feel you need it.

CAROL

No one else has ever taken the trouble to feel that.

EVELYN

They're all too occupied in enjoying themselves.

CAROL

But I don't think they do, really.

EVELYN

That's true, but they wouldn't dare admit it.

CAROL

Put the gramophone on.

EVELYN

Now?

CAROL

Yes, please, or I shall cry again.

EVELYN

[*Rising*]

What shall we have?

CAROL

Something blaring and noisy.

EVELYN

What a baby you are!

CAROL

Am I? [*He puts on a foxtrot and stands by the machine looking at her. After a pause she speaks.*] I love this tune.

EVELYN

It's not very new, I'm afraid. I must get some more of the latest ones.

CAROL

Are you ready for your lesson?

EVELYN

Lesson?

CAROL

Yes, your dancing lesson.

EVELYN

If you are.

CAROL

Of course I am! Come on.

[*She rises.*]

EVELYN

I'll push the table back. [*He does so.*] There.

CAROL

Now then.

[*They begin to dance.*]

EVELYN

Is the time all right?

CAROL

A scrap too fast.

EVELYN

Wait a minute.

[*He stops for a second and regulates the time.*]

CAROL

That's better.

[*They dance again.*]

EVELYN

I'm so sorry. Did I kick you?

CAROL

No.

EVELYN

I warned you, didn't I?

CAROL

Hold me a little tighter.

EVELYN

All right.

[*They dance in silence for a moment.*]

CAROL

This is divine.

EVELYN

You're not teaching me a thing.

CAROL

You don't need it.

EVELYN

You're just being polite. I dance like an elephant.

CAROL

Don't be ridiculous. It would be terribly funny if anyone suddenly came in and found us.

EVELYN

There's not the least chance of it.

[*They dance in silence for a little.*]

CAROL

Oh!

EVELYN

What is it?

CAROL

We nearly crashed into that chair.

EVELYN

I'm afraid I wasn't concentrating.

CAROL

That's very naughty of you. You must.

EVELYN

All right.

[*The record comes to an end.*]]

CAROL

Put on another.

EVELYN

Very well.

[*While he does so, CAROL looks at herself carefully in the glass over the mantelpiece.*]]

CAROL

I'm enjoying myself frightfully.

EVELYN

Are you, really?

CAROL

Aren't you?

EVELYN

You know I am.

[*He takes her in his arms again.*]]

CAROL

You really must hold me a little tighter—it's so much easier to follow.

EVELYN

Like that?

CAROL

Yes—like that.

[*They stand still, she surrendering herself to him, and holds up her face deliberately to be kissed.*]

EVELYN

[*Softly*]

Carol!

[*He kisses her. They stand tightly clasped for a moment; then he firmly disentangles himself and turns off the gramophone.*]

CAROL

[*Sinking onto the sofa and passing her hand across her eyes*]

Oh, Evie!

EVELYN

[*In a different tone*]

I thought so.

CAROL

[*Looking up quickly*]

What do you mean?

EVELYN

It's unbelievable.

[*He strides about a little.*]

CAROL

[*Alarmed*]

What on earth are you talking about?

EVELYN

I was right. I knew it.

CAROL

[*Becoming exasperated*]

Knew what?

EVELYN

I'm not quite such easy game as all that.

CAROL

[*Rising*]

Evie!

EVELYN

What a little rotter you are.

CAROL

[*Outraged*]

What!!

EVELYN

Yes, you may well look surprised. I, unfortunately, am *not* surprised.

CAROL

[*After a pause*]

I'm beginning to understand.

EVELYN

I'm glad.

CAROL

Very clever. I must congratulate Edward.

EVELYN

It's nothing to do with Edward.

CAROL

Liar!

[*She goes and takes up her cloak.*]

EVELYN

You're not going yet.

CAROL

On the contrary, I'm going immediately.

EVELYN

Not until I choose.

CAROL

Don't speak to me like that.

EVELYN

I'm going to speak to you as you've never been spoken to before.

CAROL

Pompous ass!

[*She flings her cloak over her arm and goes toward the door. EVELYN stands between her and the door.*]

EVELYN

You're going to stay here.

CAROL

[*Contemptuously*]

Don't be so ridiculous.

EVELYN

I mean it.

CAROL

Are you quite mad?

EVELYN

No, not at all; I'm unflatteringly sane.

CAROL

Do you intend to use force to keep me here?

EVELYN

Yes, if necessary.

CAROL

Evie—what have you been reading?

[*She flings down her cloak and returns to the sofa.*]

EVELYN

That's right.

CAROL

[*Helping herself to a cigarette*]

I always thought you were a fool.

EVELYN

Thank you. I'm sorry I was less of a fool than you hoped.

CAROL

I didn't hope for much, whatever happened.

EVELYN

You'd forgotten I was Edward's best friend.

CAROL

You're very, very sure of yourself.

EVELYN

I can afford to be. I live decently.

CAROL

Rubbish!

EVELYN

And I've got a little honor left.

CAROL

Even after living decently.

EVELYN

You would say a thing like that.

CAROL

I did.

EVELYN

I should like to say one thing—

CAROL

Please do.

EVELYN

If you and I were alone on a desert island I wouldn't touch you.

CAROL

That would be very silly of you.

EVELYN

[Rapidly losing his temper]

Haven't you any modesty or shame anywhere?

CAROL

[*Smiling*]

Oh dear!

EVELYN

Stop being flippant; it's only a mask to cover your
humiliation.

CAROL

How discerning you are!

EVELYN

I know you much better than you think I do.

CAROL

Idiot!

EVELYN

Flinging epithets at me won't help.

CAROL

Fatuous prig.

EVELYN

Shut up.

CAROL

[*Rising*]

May I go now please?

EVELYN

[*Almost shouting*]

No.

CAROL

[*Sitting down*]

Very well.

EVELYN

I'm Edward's best friend.

CAROL

You've said that before.

EVELYN

And I'm damned if I'm going to stand by and see him cheapened and humiliated by you.

CAROL

You're insufferable.

EVELYN

That's beside the point.

CAROL

[*Suddenly furious*]

It is *not* beside the point! How dare you behave like this! If you were Edward's Siamese twin you've no right to ask me here and insult me. You surely don't imagine that by talking until you're blue in

the face you could ever alter my life one way or another. You've played a filthy second-rate trick on me and you think you did it for Edward's sake, but all the time it was only to prove to yourself how clever you are. You've got to let me go now—at once. Do you hear? If not I'll scream the place down. [She rises and makes a dash for the door. He intercepts her. She struggles. He grasps her wrist.] Let me go. Help! Help!

EVELYN

Shut up, you little fool!

[He puts his hand over her mouth and drags her back to the sofa, upon which she collapses, sobbing.]

CAROL.

[Almost hysterical, in muffled tones]

How dare you! Oh, how dare you! It's outrageous! It's—

EVELYN

Do you want some brandy?

CAROL

Don't speak to me.

EVELYN

[With emphasis]

Do you want some brandy!

CAROL

No.

EVELYN

You'd better have some. Stay where you are.
[He goes over and pours out a glass of brandy and brings it to her.] Here—sit up.

CAROL

Go away. Don't come near me.

EVELYN

You're hysterical. Drink this and pull yourself together.

[He puts his arm round her to lift her up. She wriggles free of him, sits up quickly by herself, snatches the glass from his hand and flings it into the fireplace.]

CAROL

I don't want your filthy brandy.

EVELYN

That was childish.

CAROL

Why are you doing this to me? Why? Why?
What have I ever done to you?

EVELYN

You're on the verge of ruining the life of one of the best men that ever lived.

CAROL

[*Tearfully*]

How?

EVELYN

You know perfectly well how.

CAROL

It's no business of yours—what I do—ever.

EVELYN

I've made it my business. What you attempted to-night with me you've accomplished with other men—you've flirted and encouraged them to make love to you, and in many cases you've given yourself to them—

CAROL

Evie!

EVELYN

I don't want you to deny it or affirm it. I *know* it's true, but I don't think Edward does; he loves you too much to believe it possible, and my object in playing on you this second-rate trick, as you call it, is to make you realize what a hideous mess you're mak-

ing both of his life and your own. [*During this speech CAROL is looking at EVIE intently. He begins to stride up and down while he talks.*] Edward's too sensitive and reserved to fight for his own rights. I've known for ages that he wasn't happy—that something was weighing on his mind. To-day I asked him plump out and he admitted—
[He pauses.]

CAROL

What did he admit?

EVELYN

That he was worried and miserable about you.

CAROL

[Calmly]

And what did you advise him to do?

EVELYN

Give you hell.

CAROL

How crude of you!

EVELYN

Women of your sort require a little crudity occasionally.

CAROL

What do you mean “women of my sort”?

EVELYN

Do you want me to tell you?

CAROL

No; I don't want you to say any more at all.

EVELYN

You have the soul of a harlot!

CAROL

[*Suddenly bursting out laughing*]

Oh, Evie!

EVELYN

[*Losing control*]

Don't laugh. Don't laugh.

CAROL

[*Continuing to laugh*]

What do you expect me to do? You're so ridiculous—

EVELYN

I suppose you consider anyone with decent ideals ridiculous?

CAROL

[*Laughing helplessly*]

Oh dear! Oh dear!

EVELYN

[*Working himself up more and more*]

You think it funny that I should make an attempt to defend the honor of my best friend, who is too shamed by your utter wantonness to defend himself—

CAROL

[*Growing hysterical*]

You're mad—quite, quite mad—

EVELYN

You're deliberately ruining his reputation and wrecking his happiness because you never make the slightest effort to control your rotten passions—

CAROL

[*Rising, trying to control her hysteria*]

How dare you say that—how dare you—

EVELYN

Dare! I'll say it again and again. Rotten passions! All you live for, all you think of—women of your type can't exist without men—men—nothing but men all the time—

CAROL

[*Frantically*]

Stop! Stop! You shan't say any more. [She gives him a ringing slap on the face. He stands quite still.] Cad! cad! unutterable cad! [She

gives him another slap between each word. He remains motionless. They stand facing each other. CAROL puts her hand to her head.] I think—I think I'm going to be ill.

[She falls in a heap at his feet. He carries her back to the sofa. He deposits her there and rushes to get some more brandy. When his back is turned she lifts her head sharply and looks at him, then lets it drop attractively against the side of the sofa. He returns and ministers the brandy. After a slight pause she opens her eyes and sits up and finishes the brandy.]

EVELYN

Be careful. Don't spill it on your dress.

CAROL

I'm awfully sorry to be so stupid.

EVELYN

I didn't mean to make you ill.

CAROL

[Meekly]

Please may I go home now?

EVELYN

You'd better wait a moment until you feel stronger. I won't say any more—I promise.

CAROL

My head aches.

EVELYN

Would you like some aspirin? I think I've got some somewhere.

CAROL

No, thanks.

EVELYN

It wasn't out of any personal spite, you know—

CAROL

It doesn't matter—it—

[*She bursts into tears.*]

EVELYN

I say, don't cry—please.

CAROL

I can't help it.

[*She cries a little more.*]

EVELYN

Please! Please!

CAROL

Leave me alone. I'll be all right in a minute.

EVELYN

I had no intention of losing my temper. I apologize.

CAROL

[*With a fresh burst of tears*]

It's all so—so horrible!

EVELYN

Carol—please, please don't!

CAROL

[*Sobbing bitterly*]

I'd no idea—anyone could think of me like that.

EVELYN

I was only trying to show you, for Edward's sake—

CAROL

Don't—don't say any more. You promised.

EVELYN

All right, but you see I—

CAROL

I understand why you did it. It's not that I'm crying for. It's—it's— O God!

EVELYN

[*Appealingly*]

Carol—

CAROL

I'm crying because I'm so bitterly ashamed—

EVELYN

[*Gently*]

Carol—

CAROL

I don't want you to despise me utterly—

EVELYN

It's all right. Don't think any more about it.

CAROL

The things you've said to me are right—I have been shallow and cheap; but there's a reason that you don't know.

EVELYN

Reason?

CAROL

You've heard Edward's side of the story and you've mixed yourself up in our lives—more than ever now. It's only fair for you to hear my side, too—

EVELYN

Now look here, Carol. Don't let's say any more about it at all.

CAROL

Do you mean that?

EVELYN

Yes.

CAROL

[*Rising*]

Very well—I suppose I deserve it. Good night.
[*She walks sadly toward the door.*]

EVELYN

Carol—

CAROL

[*Turning*]

Yes?

EVELYN

I'll hear your side if you want me to, but what's the use of going on any further?

CAROL

Only that unless I explain now I can never look you in the face again.

EVELYN

Carol, don't be so absurd.

CAROL

There are circumstances that justify me more than you realize.

EVELYN

Come back, then, and sit down.

CAROL

[*Wearily returning]*

I feel so horribly tired.

[*She comes back to the sofa and leans against it, looking at him. Her face is pale and she looks extremely sad and quite lovely.]*

EVELYN

Do sit down.

CAROL

No, but I want you to. Sit here where you needn't look at me.

EVELYN

Very well.

[*He sits down on the sofa and stares into the fire. CAROL stands just behind him with her hands resting on his shoulders. Both their faces are half turned to the audience. She speaks very slowly.]*

CAROL

You've been pretty brutal to me to-night and some of the hard things you said I deserve, but not all of them. I'm selfish and occasionally cheap and rather vain—and I have been unfaithful to my husband, but not before he had been unfaithful to me—

EVELYN

[*Starting*]

What!

CAROL

[*Pressing him down*]

Keep still, please. I'm telling you the truth—

EVELYN

You mean that Edward—

CAROL

I mean exactly what I say. I was completely faithful to Edward until eighteen months ago, when I discovered that he was having an affair with Zoe St. Merryn—

EVELYN

Good God!

[*He moves again, but she holds him firmly.*]

CAROL

That broke me up, rather.

EVELYN

I don't believe it.

CAROL

I can't help that; it's true, all the same.

EVELYN

How did you discover it? What proof have you?

CAROL

I suspected for a little while and said nothing until I could bear it no longer; then I asked Edward and he admitted it—

EVELYN

[*Twisting round*]

I must look at you.

CAROL

[*Firmly, looking into his eyes*]

He admitted it.

EVELYN

It's incredible.

CAROL

Why? Edward's awfully weak, and Zoe—[*She laughs sadly.*] Will you turn around again now, please. [EVELYN does so and buries his face in his hands.] Don't be upset about it, Evie—it's between

Edward and me, really, and nobody knew—until now. I made him swear never to tell a soul, otherwise he'd have told you ages ago—he always tells you everything. I've behaved rather badly since then, I know, but something went dead, inside me and—well, it doesn't seem to matter much, does it?

EVELYN

[*After a pause*]

May I get up now and get a drink?

CAROL

There's nothing more to say, anyhow.

[EVELYN goes over and pours himself out a drink.

He turns suddenly.]

EVELYN

You wouldn't lie to me, would you?

CAROL

[*With dignity*]

Even I have a little decency left.

[*She turns to go again.*]

EVELYN

Carol!

CAROL

[*Turning*]

Yes.

EVELYN

What can I say to you?

CAROL

Nothing.

EVELYN

I'm desperately sorry.

CAROL

All right.

EVELYN

I've been an abject, blundering fool. It wasn't my business, anyhow.

CAROL

[*With a wan smile*]

Your motives were sound.

EVELYN

Can you forgive me?

CAROL

Yes, of course.

EVELYN

I mean really forgive me?

CAROL

[*Holding out her hand*]

Completely.

EVELYN

You're very generous.

[*He takes it.*]

CAROL

There's one more thing I want to clear up.

EVELYN

What?

CAROL

I came here to-night for one reason only.

EVELYN

Yes?

CAROL

I love you!

EVELYN

[*Dropping her hand*]

Carol!

CAROL

It's all right—don't be afraid. I'm going now—but I didn't want you to think me too cheap—that's all.

EVELYN

I'm utterly bewildered.

CAROL

It hasn't been very easy for either of us, has it?

EVELYN

You can't mean what you say.

CAROL

You know I do—you've known it all along, subconsciously.

EVELYN

Carol—I'm dreadfully—horribly embarrassed.

CAROL

Poor old Evie.

EVELYN

I don't know what to do.

CAROL

We'll both laugh over to-night one day, won't we?

EVELYN

Will we?

CAROL

[*With beautifully forced gayety*]

Yes—you see.

EVELYN

You are an extraordinary woman.

CAROL

Just rather silly, I'm afraid. Good night.

EVELYN

I'm going to see you home.

CAROL

No, please. I'd rather go alone. Please, I mean it, honestly.

EVELYN

But—

CAROL

It's only just round the corner.

EVELYN

I can't let you go alone.

CAROL

[*With gentle firmness*]

You must—please.

EVELYN

[*Looking down*]

All right.

CAROL

We're friends, aren't we?

EVELYN

[*Still looking down*]

Yes.

CAROL

In spite of everything?

EVELYN

Yes.

CAROL

Because of everything?

EVELYN

Oh, Carol!

CAROL

Good night, my dear. [*She comes to him and kisses him gently on the mouth. Suddenly he crushes her to him. After a moment she disentangles herself.*] No, no! I didn't mean it, really. I'm not going to be cheap any more. Stand quite still where you are, not looking. I don't want you to move until I've gone.

[*She goes out quietly, leaving him standing stock-still. After a moment the front door slams. EVELYN turns in the direction of the sound.*]

EVELYN

[*Emotionally*]

Carol—O God!

[*He goes over to the sofa and flings himself down on it, with his face buried in his hands. CAROL comes softly in again. Her cloak is over her arm. She gives one look in his direction and then goes noiselessly into his bedroom, closing the door after her.*]]

CURTAIN

“THIS WAS A MAN”

Act Three

ACT III

The scene is the same as Act I. It is about twelve o'clock in the morning. One night has elapsed since Act II.

[*When the curtain rises the studio is empty. There is the sound of the front-door bell ringing with some violence. BERRY enters, R., and crosses over L. He exits and reappears in a moment, ushering in EVELYN. EVELYN is looking extremely white and strained.]*

BERRY

Can I offer you anything to drink, sir?

EVELYN

No, thanks.

BERRY

The master's sure to be in soon, sir.

EVELYN

All right, thanks.

BERRY

He's only taking a walk in the Park.

EVELYN

I think I will have a drink, after all.

BERRY

Very good, sir. Whisky and soda?

EVELYN

Yes, please.

[BERRY goes out. EVELYN proceeds to pace up and down the room a little. BERRY returns with a whisky and soda.]

EVELYN

Oh, thanks.

[He takes it.]

BERRY

Would you like the papers, sir, or have you seen them already?

EVELYN

I've seen them, thanks.

BERRY

Shall I tell Mrs. Churt that you are here, sir?

EVELYN

No—no. Please don't disturb her.

BERRY

Very good, sir.

[*He goes out again. EVELYN once more proceeds to pace up and down with the whisky and soda in his hand. He is obviously extremely agitated. After a moment CAROL enters from R. She looks fresh and charming. She gives a slight start on seeing EVELYN.*]]

CAROL

Evie!

EVELYN

[*Jumping—he turns*]

I've come to see Edward.

CAROL

What's the matter?

EVELYN

I've come to see Edward.

CAROL

[*With faint apprehension*]

I know—you just said so. Aren't you going to say good morning?

EVELYN

Good morning.

CAROL

[*Going over to him*]

No more than that?

EVELYN

No—no more.

[*He turns away.*]

CAROL

[*Biting her lip*]

I see.

EVELYN

I want to see him alone.

CAROL

[*Putting her hand on his arm*]

Evie, what's wrong?

EVELYN

You can seriously ask me that?

CAROL

Why are you behaving like this?

EVELYN

[*Turning away*]

You're hopeless.

CAROL

You're not going to do anything foolish, are you?

EVELYN

I'm going to do the only thing possible.

CAROL

[*Swinging him round*]
Evie!

EVELYN

Leave me alone.

CAROL

But listen—

EVELYN

[*Wrenching himself free from her*]
Don't touch me, please.

CAROL

[*Pleading*]
Evie—please—why are you being so horrid?

EVELYN

I don't want to look at you—or see you again
ever!

CAROL

Why—why—what have I done?

EVELYN

[*Sinking into a chair with his face in his hands*]
Leave me alone. Leave me alone.

CAROL

You don't love me at all, then?

EVELYN

For God's sake stop!

CAROL

You don't—you don't—

EVELYN

Shut up! Shut up!

CAROL

You coward!

[*She goes over to the window.*]

EVELYN

Please go away. You'll only make everything
much worse.

CAROL

Why have you come here this morning?

EVELYN

To tell Edward about last night.

CAROL

What will you tell him?

EVELYN

The truth.

CAROL

You're insane.

EVELYN

I was—but I'm not any more.

CAROL

[Coming quickly back to him]

You can't mean this.

EVELYN

I do mean it.

CAROL

But why! Why!! Why!!!

EVELYN

I don't expect you to understand.

CAROL

Evie, listen. Be sensible for a moment.

EVELYN

It's no use going on like that. I've made up my mind.

CAROL

Evie—

EVELYN

[Rising]

Go away! Go away!

CAROL

[*Following him*]
I love you.

EVELYN

Be quiet.

CAROL

I love you—I love you. Tell what you like—shout it from the housetops. I love you!

EVELYN

[*Catching hold of her*]
Shut up—you must. Some one will hear.

CAROL

I don't care.

EVELYN

You don't love me—you never did for a moment—it was all a trick.

CAROL

[*Outraged*]
Evie!

EVELYN

I can see it all now—I can see it all.

CAROL

You're talking nonsense.

EVELYN

For God's sake go away from me.

CAROL

[*Helplessly*]

I don't know what to do.

EVELYN

Leave me alone. I've got to tell Edward the truth.

CAROL

In Heaven's name, why?

EVELYN

Can't you see why?

CAROL

No. What good will it do?

EVELYN

I've betrayed him.

CAROL

That's no reason for you to betray me as well.

EVELYN

He trusted me—completely.

CAROL

Well, why not let him go on trusting you?

EVELYN

Because I'm unworthy of it forever.

CAROL

And what about me?

EVELYN

It was your fault.

CAROL

How chivalrous.

EVELYN

You lied to me.

CAROL

[*Firmly*]

I did *not* lie to you.

EVELYN

You said you came last night because you loved me.

CAROL

So I did!

EVELYN

You came out of curiosity and stayed out of revenge.

CAROL

What a fool you are!

EVELYN

You determined to get even with me.

CAROL

Evie!

EVELYN

It's true—it's true—you know it is.

CAROL

Why have you built up this ridiculous story in your mind?

EVELYN

It's true.

CAROL

[*With great firmness*]

It's nothing of the sort, and if you calm yourself and think seriously for a moment, you'll realize the complete absurdity of it. You must be sensible. Do you hear—you *must* be sensible. You're on the verge of wrecking everything out of sheer hysteria.

EVELYN

Everything is wrecked already. I've got nothing left—no honor, no decency—

CAROL-

[*Quietly*]

I gave myself to you last night, Evie—

EVELYN

Don't—don't—

CAROL

I gave myself to you completely and for one reason only—I loved you. I love you now.

EVELYN

Carol, please—

CAROL

If you tell Edward—I shall go away and never see either of you again.

EVELYN

I can't help it. I—

CAROL

You *can* help it. What you're contemplating is utterly without reason. If you're trying to vindicate your honor, you can't seriously achieve it by betraying mine. We've both behaved abominably, I admit. We've both been weak and uncontrolled and given way completely and we shall suffer for it accordingly, you needn't doubt that for a minute. We're

in a terrible mess, but we're in it together and together we must remain—

EVELYN

I shall never be able to look Edward in the face again.

CAROL

Will you be able to face him any better after you've told him?

EVELYN

Yes.

CAROL

Why?

EVELYN

Because I shall have done the only decent thing left to me.

CAROL

You'll only succeed in making him suffer as well as yourself and me. Can't you see the uselessness of it?

EVELYN

I can't see him and talk to him with this shame between us.

CAROL

You must—so must I. It's the just penalty for what we've done. You said just now you never

wanted to see me again. Well, I promise you you never shall—alone. You at least can go away. I can’t—I’ve got to stay and get through the next few months as best I can—

[*There comes a ring at the front-door bell.*]

EVELYN

[*Pacing the room*]

O God! what am I to do?

CAROL

[*Quickly*]

Nothing—nothing yet, anyhow. Think sensibly and quietly—everything depends on your keeping calm—

[*BERRY enters and crosses over L. and exits.*]

EVELYN

Is that Edward?

CAROL

Yes, I expect so. He’s always forgetting his key.

EVELYN

[*Terribly undecided*]

Carol, I—

CAROL

Promise you’ll do nothing yet.

EVELYN

I can’t—I—

CAROL

[*Whispering violently*]

Promise me—wait a little—promise me. Will you promise me?

EVELYN

[*Helplessly*]

Yes.

[BERRY *re-enters.*]

BERRY

[*Announcing*]

Mrs. St. Merryn.

[ZOE *enters briskly.*]

ZOE

Good morning, Carol. I haven't seen you for months. How are you?

CAROL

[*As they kiss*]

Splendid. I heard you were back.

ZOE

Hallo, Evie!

EVELYN

[*Coldly*]

Good morning.

ZOE

I gather that Edward is expected?

CAROL

Yes, he'll be back at any minute.

EVELYN

Good-by.

[*He goes out abruptly.*]

ZOE

[*Surprised*]

That was one of the most sudden exits I've ever seen.

CAROL

[*Carelessly*]

I think Evie's upset about something.

ZOE

I didn't think he was capable of it.

CAROL

[*Conventionally*]

Are you glad to be back?

ZOE

Delighted. London's looking so pretty with all the roads up.

CAROL

[*Absently*]

Are they? I hadn't noticed.

ZOE

I don't see how you could fail to unless you travel exclusively in the underground.

CAROL

Where are you staying?

ZOE

Claridge's.

CAROL

Oh!

ZOE

It's so beautifully austere.

CAROL

What?

ZOE

[*Patiently*]

I said it was so beautifully austere.

CAROL

Oh yes, it is.

ZOE

You're looking awfully well.

CAROL

I am, frightfully well.

ZOE

Don't you think I'm looking frightfully well?

CAROL

Yes, you certainly are. Traveling obviously agrees with you.

ZOE

It's so comforting to know that we both look so awfully well. Can I have a cigarette?

CAROL

Yes, of course. I'm so sorry. Here—
[She hands her a box open.]

ZOE

Thank you, dear. There aren't any in this box, but it doesn't matter.

CAROL

How annoying! Wait a minute. [She takes another box off a table, left.] Here—

ZOE

[*Taking one*]

You seem a little distract this morning, if I may say so.

CAROL

I've got rather a headache.

ZOE

I'm so sorry. You don't look very well.

CAROL

I think, if you'll forgive me, I'll go and take some aspirin.

ZOE

Of course. I should lie down until lunch if I were you.

CAROL

Perhaps I will. Edward's certain to be in soon.

ZOE

I'll be perfectly happy waiting.

CAROL

You must come and dine one night.

ZOE

I'd adore to.

CAROL

Good-by for the present, dear.
[She kisses her.]

ZOE

Good-by. I'm sorry you're so seedy. I'm afraid you've been overdoing it lately.

CAROL

[*Irritatedly*]
Overdoing what?

ZOE

[*Vaguely*]
Oh, everything.

CAROL

No, I haven't.

ZOE

I'm so glad.
[Carol goes out. Zoe wanders round the room, smiling to herself, examining various portraits, etc. After a moment Edward enters.]

EDWARD

Zoe! How long have you been here?

ZOE

Only a few minutes.

EDWARD

I've been out in the Park.

ZOE

I didn't know it was still there.

EDWARD

I'm afraid you're finding the old town sadly changed.

ZOE

I'm sure it's much more hygienic now.

EDWARD

Have you seen Carol?

ZOE

Yes. She's just gone to bed.

EDWARD

Gone to bed?

ZOE

She said she had a headache.

EDWARD

How do you think she's looking?

ZOE

[*Laughing*]

Awfully well.

EDWARD

What are you laughing at?

ZOE

Carol always makes me laugh.

EDWARD

Why?

ZOE

She's so consistent.

EDWARD

Are you lunching with me?

ZOE

If you like. I've got to go to Sloane Street first and look at Mary Phillip's house. She wants to let it to me.

EDWARD

Pick me up here on the way back.

ZOE

I really came to ask you to dine to-night and go to a play.

EDWARD

I'd love to. What do you want to see?

ZOE

A nice clean play, please, Edward.

EDWARD

Splendid. We shan't have any trouble getting seats.

ZOE

I'm so old-fashioned—I like love stories without the slightest suggestion of sex.

EDWARD

You ought to be a critic.

ZOE

You're an awfully nice person to come back to!

EDWARD

[*Smiling*]

Am I?

ZOE

Yes. One picks up the threads exactly where they were dropped.

EDWARD

They were never dropped.

ZOE

Carol's an awful fool.

EDWARD

Why?

ZOE

She could hold you if she wanted to.

EDWARD

Don't be tiresome, Zoe.

ZOE

What are you going to do about it?

EDWARD

About what?

ZOE

Do you really want me to be explicit?

EDWARD

No. I know perfectly well what you mean.

ZOE

You're wasting time.

EDWARD

Not at all. I'm working hard.

ZOE

You said that yesterday and it was no more convincing then than it is now.

EDWARD

It's true.

ZOE

Perhaps, but rather beside the point.

EDWARD

What is the point?

ZOE

Your happiness.

EDWARD

What beautiful thoughts you have, Zoe.

ZOE

Don't be flippant.

EDWARD

Flippancy alleviates my boredom with the whole subject.

ZOE

Are you sure you're not confusing boredom with lack of moral courage?

EDWARD

Possibly.

ZOE

Well, don't.

EDWARD

I refuse to be dominated, Zoe—even by you!

ZOE

[*Smiling*]

That's right, dear.

EDWARD

And don't laugh at me.

ZOE

I always have. I fail to see why I should stop now.

EDWARD

I resent it bitterly.

ZOE

Dear Edward.

EDWARD

What do you expect me to do?

ZOE

Deliver an ultimatum.

EDWARD

That would be stepping out of my character.

ZOE

Nonsense!

EDWARD

I am essentially a weak-minded man.

ZOE

Nothing of the sort—you're a lazy idealist.

EDWARD

That sounds delightful.

ZOE

So it is in theory; in practice it's sterility personified.

EDWARD

You're terribly didactic.

ZOE

I'm trying to rouse you.

EDWARD

Why?

ZOE

Because you're discontented and unhappy.

EDWARD

I never said so.

ZOE

You don't need to—it's written all over you.

EDWARD

You think I'd be happier if I bashed about making scenes and delivering ultimatums?

ZOE

Certainly—you at least might achieve something.

EDWARD

What, for instance?

ZOE

Freedom!

EDWARD

That's a myth.

ZOE

Oh no, it isn't.

EDWARD

In this case it's impossible.

ZOE

Why?

EDWARD

[*Turning away*]

Oh, don't let's discuss it any more.

ZOE

You *are* annoying, Edward.

EDWARD

Evie went on like that for hours yesterday.

ZOE

Evie?

EDWARD

Yes. He seemed to advocate violence as being the best method.

ZOE

He would.

EDWARD

He even offered to teach Carol a lesson.

ZOE

What sort of lesson?

EDWARD

He didn't explain.

ZOE

Poor Evie.

EDWARD

You needn't despise him so utterly. He's a good sort.

ZOE

He's the quintessence of masculine complacency.

EDWARD

I'm sure it's a great comfort to him. I wish I was.

ZOE

Evie will get into trouble one of these days. He's too worldly.

EDWARD

If I were free, Zoe, would you marry me?

ZOE

Edward!

EDWARD

I suddenly thought of it.

ZOE

[*Laughing*]

This is terribly sudden.

EDWARD

Don't be silly.

ZOE

You must give me time to think.

EDWARD

Do shut up and be serious.

ZOE

I have a vague feeling that your proposal is a little previous.

EDWARD

It wasn't a proposal—just an idea.

ZOE

Not exactly an original one. We discussed it all ages ago.

EDWARD

And whose fault was it that it never came off?

ZOE

[*Promptly*]

Yours.

EDWARD

Zoe, how can you? It was entirely yours.

ZOE

Nonsense! I was dead set on it.

EDWARD

You refused me and rushed off to Africa.

ZOE

You can't call Algiers Africa.

EDWARD

It is, all the same.

ZOE

If you'd loved me enough, you'd have followed me.

EDWARD

I was waiting for you to come back.

ZOE

Let's stop talking about it—it's rather painful.

EDWARD

We weren't in love, really, anyhow.

ZOE

Weren't we?

EDWARD

I don't know.

ZOE

It's all very difficult.

EDWARD

Yes.

ZOE

I think I shall go away again soon.

EDWARD

Oh, Zoe, please don't!

ZOE

It's going to be awkward if I stay.

EDWARD

No, it isn't.

ZOE

We're both on rather dangerous ground.

EDWARD

I don't see why.

ZOE

Yes, you do, perfectly.

EDWARD

I do not.

ZOE

If I stay, we shall probably fall in love properly
—we're both at a perilous age.

EDWARD

What if we do?

ZOE

It would be too horrible, with all this Carol busi-
ness going on and everything.

EDWARD

You're crossing your bridges before you come to
them.

ZOE

I shall go, all the same.

EDWARD

That is rank cowardice.

ZOE

No, it isn't; it's sound sense.

EDWARD

It will be beastly for me.

ZOE

Not so beastly as if I stayed, really—in the long run.

EDWARD

What could happen?

ZOE

Oh, the usual thing, I suppose—we should have an affair and spoil everything.

EDWARD

I don't see why.

ZOE

You're being very obstinate this morning.

EDWARD

If I were in love with you at all, it would be in a very nice, restrained way.

ZOE

We should both tire of that very quickly.

EDWARD

Zoe, how can you be so unpleasant?

ZOE

I'm only facing facts.

EDWARD

We've been together a good deal in the past.

ZOE

I know.

EDWARD

And everything was above reproach.

ZOE

Entirely.

EDWARD

Well, why can't we go on like that?

ZOE

Because even if we do, people will say we don't.

EDWARD

What does that matter?

ZOE

It matters a lot. I've had enough squalor in the past few years to last me for life.

EDWARD

Yes, but I don't see—

ZOE

Also I have a strange aversion to coming between man and wife.

EDWARD

Oh, shut up, Zoe.

ZOE

It's true. I suffer from a pre-war conscience.

EDWARD

There's no question of that, really.

ZOE

Don't be silly. Of course there is.

EDWARD

Carol wouldn't care.

ZOE

What difference does that make? Really, Edward, you're being horribly flaccid over the whole thing!

EDWARD

Don't let's argue about it.

ZOE

All right.

EDWARD

But please don't go away again—just yet.

ZOE

I'll think it over, Edward.

EDWARD

You've depressed me terribly.

ZOE

I'm sorry.

EDWARD

It's all such a hopeless muddle.

ZOE

It needn't be.

EDWARD

I'd no idea you were so designing.

ZOE

What a horrid thing to say!

EDWARD

It's true though, isn't it?

ZOE

Absolutely.

EDWARD

Oh, Zoe—

ZOE

I must go.

EDWARD

Remember lunch.

ZOE

I'll pick you up here.

EDWARD

No, don't—I'll meet you.

ZOE

Where?

EDWARD

Berkeley—one o'clock.

ZOE

I'm sure to be late.

EDWARD

So am I.

ZOE

Good-by, dear.

[*She goes up to him and kisses him lightly.*]

EDWARD

Zoe!

ZOE

That was part of the design!

[*She goes out. EDWARD walks up and down irritably for a moment, then lights a cigarette and flings himself into an armchair. The telephone rings. He gives an exclamation of annoyance and rises to answer it.*]

EDWARD

[*At telephone*]

Hallo! . . . Yes—yes . . . Who is it speaking? . . . No, I'm afraid you can't. She isn't very well—
[CAROL enters in time to catch the last sentence.]

CAROL

Who is it?

EDWARD

Oh. . . . Hold on, please. . . . Harry Challoner.
[He hands her the telephone curtly and goes over to the window.]

CAROL

[At telephone]

Hallo! . . . Yes, it's me. . . . No—no, I can't. I'm sorry. . . . All right, if you like. . . . I'll be in between six and seven. . . . Yes. . . . Good-by.

[She hangs up the receiver and looks toward EDWARD who has his back turned. She is about to go out again, when he turns.]

EDWARD

Carol.

CAROL

Yes?

EDWARD

I want to talk to you.

CAROL

Is anything the matter?

EDWARD

Yes. Sit down, will you?

CAROL

[Sitting]

If you like.

EDWARD

I want to get things settled.

CAROL

Get things settled?

EDWARD

Yes.

CAROL

What sort of things?

EDWARD

Our exact relationship.

CAROL

What *do* you mean?

EDWARD

Just that.

CAROL

I don't understand.

EDWARD

I think you do.

CAROL

[*By now extremely apprehensive*]

I don't Edward, honestly.

EDWARD

Do you intend to pursue your present course indefinitely?

CAROL

What are you talking about?

EDWARD

Infidelity.

CAROL

Are you insinuating that I—

EDWARD

I'm insinuating nothing. I'm stating that you have been unfaithful to me.

CAROL

[*Rising*]

Edward!

EDWARD

[*Firmly*]

Sit down. This is not a scene—it's a process of readjustment. Please let us keep it as brief as possible.

CAROL

[*Sinking down*]

How can you be so horrible!

EDWARD

Do you deny it?

CAROL

Of course I do.

EDWARD

Carol, let me disillusion you. I'm not bluffing. **I know.** I've known for ages. It's no use wasting time denying and arguing. We must decide what's to be done about it.

CAROL

How can you be so foul!

EDWARD

[*Wearily*]

Oh, Carol, do stop acting.

CAROL

You're insufferable.

EDWARD

Once and for all will you be sensible?

CAROL

I hate you.

EDWARD

That would be beautifully definite if you weren't so unreliable.

CAROL

Do you want me to hate you?

EDWARD

To be honest with you, I really don't mind.

CAROL

[*Outraged*]

Edward!

EDWARD

Don't be a fool, Carol.

CAROL

How dare you! How dare you!

EDWARD

We will face facts, please.

CAROL

[*Rising*]

I'm not going to stay here and be insulted.

EDWARD

You're not being insulted—it's I who have been insulted. You've been publicly underrating my intelligence for months.

CAROL

That's what's upsetting you, is it?

EDWARD

Certainly it is. I wish you'd sit down.

CAROL

I'm going to my room.

EDWARD

You're only temporarily evading the issues by doing that.

CAROL

What's the object of all this?

EDWARD

The object, as I said before, is to get our relationship satisfactorily defined.

CAROL

[*With grandeur*]

It's satisfactorily defined now as far as I am concerned.

EDWARD

I would prefer the satisfaction to be mutual.

CAROL

You think you're very clever, don't you?

EDWARD

What a common remark! You'll be sticking your tongue out at me in a minute.

CAROL

I suppose Zoe has been putting you up to this.

EDWARD

Meaning that I have no initiative of my own anyhow?

CAROL

Exactly.

EDWARD

That's charming of you—and fits in beautifully with your behavior during the last year.

CAROL

Are you in love with me still?

EDWARD

Do you expect me to be?

CAROL

Are you?

EDWARD

No, Carol.

CAROL

I see.

EDWARD

All of which is beside the point.

CAROL

No, it isn't. If you loved me you'd never say such things to me.

EDWARD

I admit that it would be more comfortable for you if I just suffered and suffered in silence.

CAROL

You're too unemotional to be capable of any suffering.

EDWARD

Do you imagine you're putting up a good defense for yourself?

CAROL

I'm not attempting to.

EDWARD

That brings us to my ultimatum.

CAROL

[*With a forced laugh*]

Ultimatum! Really Edward!

EDWARD

You've been unfaithful to me three times during the past year—Maurice Verney, Geoffrey Poole, and now Harry Challoner!

CAROL

[*Blanching slightly*]

Edward!

EDWARD

All three married men, which adds considerably to
the general sordidness of the whole business.

CAROL

[*Losing control*]

I will *not* be spoken to like this!

EDWARD

[*With sudden force*]

Be quiet! Do you still deny it?

CAROL

[*More dimly*]

No.

EDWARD

That's better.

CAROL

[*Sullenly*]

I'm sorry.

EDWARD

That's too sudden to be convincing.

CAROL

[*Breaking up slightly; after a long pause*]
What are you going to do?

EDWARD

Wait until next time.

CAROL

Next time?

EDWARD

Yes.

CAROL

And what then?

EDWARD

I shall divorce you.

CAROL

Edward!

EDWARD

I mean it. Whether the man happens to be married or single will not make the slightest difference.

CAROL

[*Looking down*]

I see.

EDWARD

Is that quite clear?

CAROL

Quite.

EDWARD

Incidentally, I wish you to give up Harry Chaloner entirely. I object to you even being seen with such a second-rate bounder.

CAROL

[*Looking at him*]

Very well.

EDWARD

We'll both do our best to forget the whole thing. We can get along perfectly well together with a little effort.

CAROL

There's no more, is there?

EDWARD

No, that's all.

[CAROL goes slowly toward the door in silence. Her expression is very thoughtful. When she reaches the door she turns.]

CAROL

[*In a different voice*]

Edward.

EDWARD

Yes?

CAROL

Please forgive me.

EDWARD

Forgiveness in this case is surely rather unimportant.

CAROL

Oh, please, please—

[*She bursts into tears and goes toward him*]

EDWARD

Now then, Carol—

CAROL

[*Standing in front of him weeping*]

You must forgive me—you must!

EDWARD

All right.

CAROL

I didn't love any of them—I swear I didn't.

EDWARD

[*Turning away irritably*]

Oh, Carol—

CAROL

You've been utterly indifferent to me for ages.

EDWARD

Naturally.

CAROL

No, but before—I mean before—last year you stopped loving me.

EDWARD

Please don't go on like this.

CAROL

It's true—it's true. I was lonely.

EDWARD

Don't talk such utter nonsense.

CAROL

[*Working herself up*]

It isn't nonsense—it's you I love really all the time. I hate Harry Challoner, really. I've been trying to break with him for ages. I made a vow weeks ago that I'd never be unfaithful to you again—honestly I did, I swear it. I'm sick of everybody. I wanted

to ask you to take me away abroad somewhere, but I didn't dare—you had so much work to do—and you were so cold and horrid. Edward—Edward—you've got to love me again—you must. I shall go mad if you don't. Please—Edward darling.

[*She flings herself into his arms.*]

EDWARD

[*Gently disentangling himself*]

There now—it's all right. Do stop.

[*He kisses her dutifully*]

CAROL

I feel so bitterly ashamed.

EDWARD

Stop crying.

CAROL

I swear I'll be good. I swear I will.

EDWARD

That's right. Now control yourself.

CAROL

I'll never see Harry again.

EDWARD

Very well. For Heaven's sake stop crying.

CAROL

I do love you really, you know. That's what makes it so awful.

EDWARD

Pull yourself together.

CAROL

[*Dabbing her eyes*]

I'll try.

EDWARD

Go and lie down and take something.

CAROL

What shall I take?

EDWARD

Aspirin, I should think.

CAROL

I had some just now.

EDWARD

Have some more.

CAROL

All right. Oh, God!

[*She goes out slowly, still half sobbing.* EDWARD *heaves a sigh of mingled relief and irritation,*

he again flings himself into an armchair. Then comes the sound of the front-door bell. He groans. BERRY enters from R.]

EDWARD

Whoever it is, Berry, I'm out.

BERRY

Very good, sir. [*He goes out L. After a moment he re-enters.*] I'm very sorry, sir; it's Major Bathurst. The porter downstairs told him you'd just come in; he's called already this morning.

EDWARD

Nobody told me. You'd better show him in.

BERRY

Yes, sir. [*He goes out and returns, announcing*] Major Bathurst.

[EVELYN comes in. *He looks more harassed than ever.* BERRY goes out.]

EDWARD

Hallo, Evie!

EVELYN

[*Haltingly*]

Edward—I—I've come to say good-by.

EDWARD

[*Surprised*]

Good-by!

EVELYN

Yes. I came earlier this morning, but you were out.

EDWARD

But where on earth are you going?

EVELYN

Australia.

EDWARD

Why Australia?

EVELYN

[*Weakly*]

I've always wanted to go to Australia.

EDWARD

What *do* you mean?

EVELYN

I mean I've got to go there on business.

EDWARD

It's very sudden, isn't it?

EVELYN

Yes. I had a wire from my brother.

EDWARD

I didn't know he was in Australia.

EVELYN

He isn't. He's in Cheltenham, but he sent me a wire saying I ought to go out there at once.

EDWARD

What's the matter with you, Evie?

EVELYN

Nothing.

EDWARD

You're not only telling me extremely fatuous lies, but you look like death.

EVELYN

They're not lies. I—

EDWARD

Don't be an ass. Have a drink.

EVELYN

No—I don't want a drink.

EDWARD

What's wrong?

EVELYN

There's nothing wrong.

EDWARD

You'd better tell me, you know.

EVELYN

I want to tell you.

EDWARD

Come on, then.

EVELYN

I've got to tell you.

EDWARD

Out with it.

EVELYN

But I can't.

EDWARD

Surely that's rather silly.

EVELYN

I tried to shoot myself this morning.

EDWARD

You what! ! !

EVELYN

Tried to shoot myself.

EDWARD

[*Alarmed*]

In God's name, why?

EVELYN

[*Brokenly*]

Oh, Edward!

EDWARD

Evie, what *has* happened?

EVELYN

I'm the filthiest cad in the world.

EDWARD

Don't be ridiculous.

EVELYN

Our friendship is over forever.

EDWARD

[*With irritation*]

Do stop all this melodrama, Evie, and tell me
what's the matter.

EVELYN

I've betrayed you, utterly.

EDWARD

[*In great astonishment*]
Betrayed me?

EVELYN

[*Looking down*]
Yes.

EDWARD

How?

EVELYN

[*Brokenly*]
Carol!

EDWARD

Carol! Well, what about her?

EVELYN

Carol dined with me last night.

EDWARD

Oh, did she?

EVELYN

And—and—O my God!

[*He sinks into a chair by the table and leans his head on his arms.*]

EDWARD

[*In amazement*]

You don't seriously mean to tell me—

EVELYN

[*In muffled tones*]

Yes.

EDWARD

You and Carol!

EVELYN

Yes.

EDWARD

This is too much!

[*He bursts out laughing.*]

EVELYN

[*Looking up astounded*]

Edward!

EDWARD

I can't bear it.

[*He laughs louder.*]

EVELYN

[*Rising*]

Edward—old man—please—

EDWARD

[*Helplessly*]

It's unbelievable—incredible. Oh dear!

[*He collapses on the window seat.*]

EVELYN

[*Approaching him*]

Edward—for God's sake—

EDWARD

[*Weakly*]

Don't come near me. I shall be all right in a minute.

EVELYN

[*With growing anger*]

You must be mad.

EDWARD

I certainly feel very strange.

[*He goes into fits of laughter again.*]

EVELYN

[*Outraged*]

Edward—do you realize what I've just told you?

EDWARD

[*Trying to control himself*]

Yes—perfectly.

EVELYN

And you can laugh!

EDWARD

Will you hand me a cigarette, please?

EVELYN

[*Irately*]

Look here, Edward—

EDWARD

[*With sudden firmness*]

Will you hand me a cigarette, please.

EVELYN

Here.

[*He offers him his case.*]

EDWARD

Thanks. [*He takes one.*] Light.

EVELYN

Here.

[*He strikes a match.*]

EDWARD

Thanks. I feel better now.

EVELYN

Well! What are you going to do about it?

EDWARD

Ring that bell, will you? By the door.

EVELYN

I can find my own way out.

EDWARD

[*Firmly*]

You're not going yet. Ring the bell, please.

[EVELYN looks at him and then goes and rings the bell.]

EVELYN

Look here, Edward, I came here this morning because I felt I owed it to our friendship to confess the truth to you—

EDWARD

You're out of your depth, Evie—far, far out of your depth.

EVELYN

I don't know what you mean.

EDWARD

This is reality, not fiction

[BERRY enters.]

BERRY

You rang, sir?

EDWARD

Will you ask your mistress to come down immediately, please, Berry? It's very important.

BERRY

Yes, sir.

[*He goes out.*]

EVELYN

[*Panic-stricken*]

Edward, this is not fair of you.

EDWARD

[*Unceremoniously*]

Shut up.

EVELYN

This is between us.

EDWARD

The three of us, Evie—what's known, I believe, as the eternal triangle.

EVELYN

Let me tell you one thing—what happened was not deliberate.

EDWARD

You prefer to be thought a fool rather than a cad!

EVELYN

Yes, if you like to put it that way.

EDWARD

How typical!

EVELYN

I only asked Carol to dine, in the first place, for your sake.

EDWARD

For my sake?

EVELYN

Yes, I intended to teach her a lesson.

EDWARD

And she ended up by teaching you one.

EVELYN

[*Utterly shocked*]

Edward!

EDWARD

Men of your sort should stick to athletics and not attempt physiology.

EVELYN

I deserve that.

EDWARD

[*Agreeably*]

Fully.

[CAROL enters from R. *She starts visibly on seeing EVELYN.*]

CAROL

What's the matter?

EDWARD

Don't look so surprised, Carol. It's terribly irritating.

CAROL

I don't understand.

EDWARD

I gather that you and Evie—

EVELYN

[*Wounded by such frankness*]

Edward!

CAROL

[*Looking at EVELYN*]

You cad!

EDWARD

It was very unpleasant of you, Carol—

CAROL

[*Appealingly*]
Edward, please—

EDWARD

I should like to know how it all happened.

EVELYN

I told you—I—

EDWARD

Carol will you explain, please?

CAROL

Certainly not.

EDWARD

Very well. You must allow me to reconstruct it
for myself.

EVELYN

Surely this is unnecessary.

EDWARD

That is entirely for me to decide.

CAROL

You're being unbelievably cheap.

EDWARD

[*Mildly*]

Really, Carol—keep a slight grip on your values.

EVELYN

Say what you like. I don't care.

EDWARD

It wouldn't make the slightest difference if you did.

EVELYN

Damned ungenerous.

EDWARD

Shut up and don't be an ass. You and Carol have brought about this abominable situation. It's up to you to keep quiet and let me straighten it out in my own way.

EVELYN

[*Turning away*]

Very well.

EDWARD

Thank you. Now then—Evie, you asked Carol to dine with you alone at your flat?

EVELYN

Yes.

EDWARD

Why?

EVELYN

I told you.

EDWARD

In order to teach her a lesson.

CAROL

Oh, this is insufferable.

EDWARD

You're perfectly right, it is. I gather that the first part of the lesson, Evie, necessitated you making love to her. Am I right?

EVELYN

[*Impatiently*]

Oh yes—

EDWARD

And then what?

[*Turning*]

EVELYN

Look here, Edward, I'm damned if I'm going to listen to this any longer—

CAROL

Neither am I!

EDWARD

Tell me the truth, then, Carol. It will simplify matters considerably. Do you love Evie?

CAROL

No.

EDWARD

Then why, if it's not an indelicate question, did you—

CAROL

[*Violently*]

Because he insulted me and tried to humiliate me and I determined to show him that he wasn't as clever as he thought he was.

EDWARD

Admirable. You, Evie, had the ineffable conceit to pit your meager experience of the world against an extremely attractive and obviously unscrupulous woman. You then give in to her completely despite the fact that she is the wife of your friend; and not content with that, you turn on her afterward, work yourself up into a frenzy of false melodramatic values, rush round here and blurt it out to me doubtless under the delusion that by uncovering the whole shameful business you are vindicating your own honor! Oh, Evie, what a pitiful fool you are!

EVELYN

It's no use blackguarding me any more, is it?
What are you going to do about it?

EDWARD

I don't quite know yet.

CAROL

There's nothing to be done.

EDWARD

You're too sure of yourself, Carol—you always have been.

EVELYN

I wish to God I had shot myself.

EDWARD

It's a little late to think of that now.

EVELYN

You're being unnecessarily cruel, Edward.

EDWARD

I'm afraid I'm a bitter disappointment to you both. You see emotionally I'm unmoved. The capacity for feeling very deeply over Carol died a long while ago.

EVELYN

I should have thought that for the sake of our friendship—

EDWARD

That's sheer cant. You've considerably over-estimated our friendship for years. If you care to analyze it honestly you'll discover that we both bore one another stiff and always have. We were at school together—in different forms—since when we've dined together on an average of once a month. We've confided our troubles superficially for the want of something to talk about. We're poles apart mentally and physically; we've built up this so-called great friendship on a basis of false tradition, and the only reason I realized it first is because my brain functions quicker than yours—

EVELYN

[*Shattered*]

Edward!

EDWARD

And I should like to add—having naturally a more acute sense of sex psychology than you—that the reason you took such a fatal interest in Carol's morals was not on my account at all, but because she'd snubbed you severely several times and you were probably very much attracted to her.

EVELYN

It's not true. You're disgusting.

EDWARD

Be that as it may, the solution to the whole thing is obvious.

EVELYN

What do you mean?

EDWARD

I'll tell you. Carol you must go away immediately.

CAROL

[*Horried*]

Edward —

EVELYN

[*Stricken*]

But—I—I—

EDWARD

Wait a moment. Let me explain. Carol, you and I have no longer the slightest justification for living together. If you go away abroad somewhere I will make it perfectly easy for you to divorce me. If you don't agree to this, I shall file a petition against you at once, naming Evie as corespondent. That's the second ultimatum I've delivered this morning and I'm feeling extremely tired.

[*He sits down.*]

CAROL

Edward, you can't mean this—you can't.

EDWARD

I do. I mean it more than I've ever meant anything in my life.

CAROL

[*Bursting into tears of rage*]

I won't stand it. I won't!

EDWARD

You're not being very polite to Evie.

EVELYN

You think you're being damned clever.

EDWARD

That's been hurled at me so often just lately that I'm honestly beginning to believe I am.

CAROL

You utter beast.

EDWARD

Well—what's the decision?

CAROL

[*Wailing*]

I'll never speak to you again—never—never—never.

EDWARD

[*Rising*]

Evie?

EVELYN

[*Gruffly*]

You'd better give us time to think.

EDWARD

What is the time now, anyhow?

EVELYN

[*Looking at his watch*]

Twenty past one.

EDWARD

My God! I knew I should be late. I'll be at the Berkeley if you want me.

[EDWARD goes out. EVELYN and CAROL look after him and then at each other.]

[CAROL after a pause walks over and sits next to EVIE.]

CAROL

Evie.

EVIE

What?

CAROL

[Sweetly]

There's still time for you to shoot yourself!

CURTAIN



